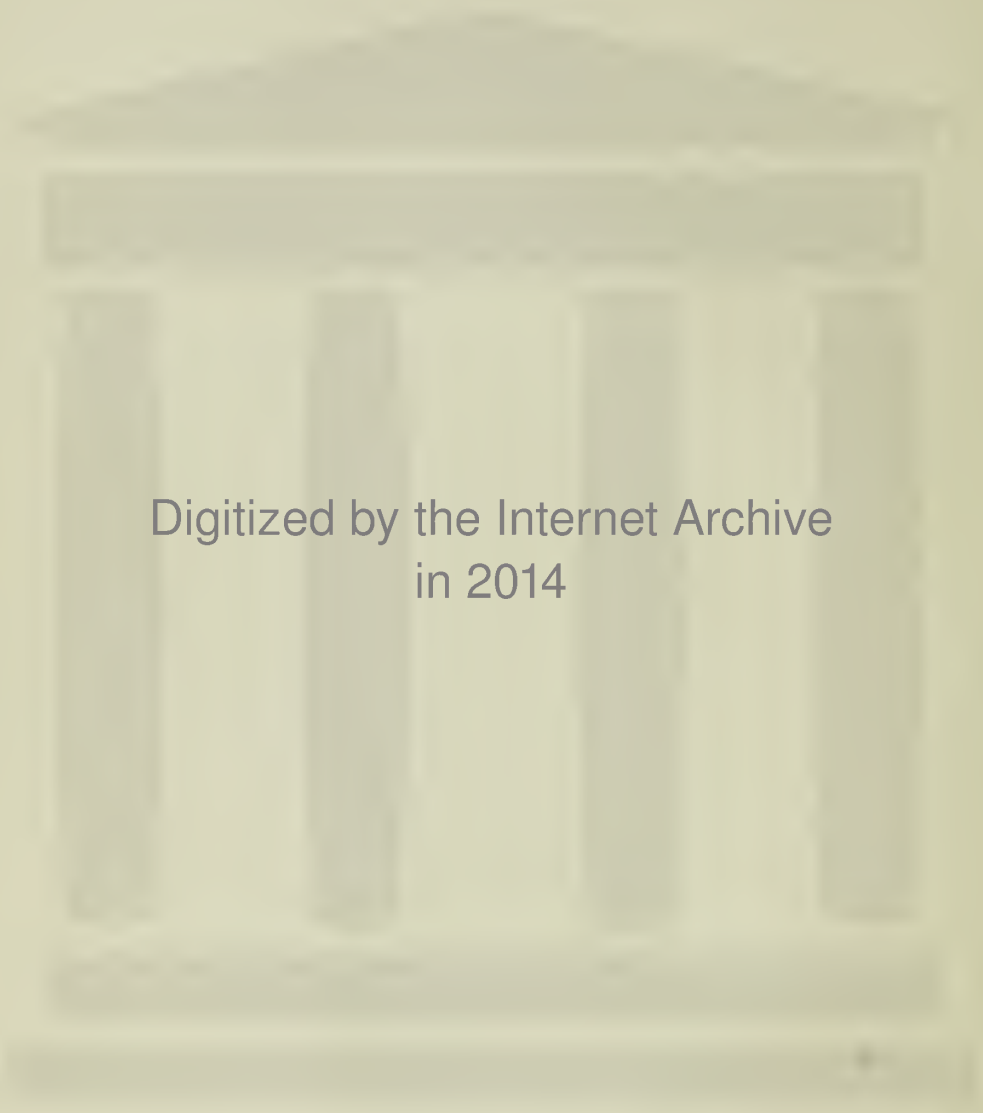

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TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 3609.

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IN ONE VOLUME.

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WIND AND WAVE

SELECTED TALES

BY

FIONA MACLEOD pseud.
Wm. Sharp

LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ
1902.

North Bennet Street
Industrial School
March 4, 1954

O.P.

FOREWORD.

It is perhaps even more difficult to make a selection from one's own work than from that of another. Bias conflicts with judgment, and as often as not association overrules both. One remembers, too, what one had in mind to write; the elusive mood; the tense emotion: one is too apt to forget the attenuated emotion, the mood arisen and gone; or to ignore, till too late, the difference between the thing done and the thing dreamed.

In the final selecting of the contents of this book, chosen from the volumes of tales and episodes, The Sin-Eater, The Washer of the Ford, The Dominion of Dreams *and* The Divine Adventure,* *the aim has been*

* "The Sin-Eater, and Other Tales." (D. Nutt, London.) "The Washer of the Ford, and Other Tales." (D. Nutt, London.) "The Dominion of Dreams." (Fifth Edition.) (A. Constable & Co., London.) "The Divine Adventure, Iona, and Other Studies in Spiritual History." (Chapman & Hall.)

to compile as representative a volume as possible. This means the exclusion of certain of the longer tales which I should have liked to include—notably "Cathal of the Woods" and "Muime Chriosd ('St. Bride of the Isles')," or, in another kind, "Morag of the Glen." It also made inevitable the rejection of some of those folk-lore narratives, as, for example, "The Ninth Wave," "The Sin-Eater," "The Three Marvels of Iona"; or episodes of reminiscence, reverie, or experience, as "Iona," "The Divine Adventure," and, on a lesser scale, "The Anointed Man," "The Wells of Peace," and the "Sundown Shores" series; such as have specially won the regard of those whose regard means much to me.

But I think the contents as they stand are sufficiently representative.

I have divided them broadly into tales of "The World That Was," and tales of "The World That Is:" because the colour and background of the one series are of a day that is past, and past not for us only, but for the forgetting race itself: while the colour and background of the other, if interchangeable, is not of a past but only of a passing world. In both, I hope, there is something of that enduring world, which lies in essential truth to

nature, material or spiritual; the truth of the actual reality, and the truth of imaginative reality.

By a further division, the selected tales fall into representative groups. In the first section of Part I, the story called "The Dan-nan-Ron" stands for the "Achanna" series: the third and fourth, for the tales of the isles that turn upon legendary lore. "The Fisher of Men" is chosen for the group comprising "The Last Supper," "The Wayfarer," "The Wells of Peace," etc. And so in turn is it with the third and with the fourth section.

In Part II the first and second sections stand for the tales of old Gaelic and Celto-Scandinavian life and mythology: the third section, for those of the interblending of paganism and Christianity; and the fourth for the tales of the dreaming imagination, having their base in the old mythology, or in a kindred mythopoeic source.

As for the collective title, I have chosen that of Wind and Wave, *because so many of these tales are of the grey wandering wave of the West, and because through each goes the wind of the Gaelic spirit, which everywhere desires infinitude, but in the penury of things as they are turns upon itself to the dim enchantment of*

dreams. And what are these, whether of a single heart on the braes of sorrow, or of the weariness of unnumbered minds in the maze of time and fate, but the dreams, or the wavering images of the dreams, with which for a thousand years the Gael has met the ignominies and sorrows of a tragical destiny; the intangible merchandise which he continually creates and continually throws away, as the May-wind gathers and scatters the gold of the broom.

FIONA MACLEOD.

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PART I.

OF THE WORLD THAT IS.

NOTE.

This story is founded upon a superstition familiar throughout the Hebrides. The legend exists also on the western coasts of Ireland; for Mr. Yeats tells me that last summer he met an old Connaught fisherman, who claimed to be of the Sliochd-nan-Ron — an ancestry, indeed, indicated in the man's name: Rooney.

As to my use of the forename "Gloom" (in this story, in its sequel "Green Branches," in "The Anointed Man," and in "Children of the Dark Star" in *The Dominion of Dreams*), I should explain that the designation is not a baptismal name. At the same time, I have actual warrant for its use; for I knew a Uist man who, in the bitterness of his sorrow, after his wife's death in childbirth, named his son *Mulad* (*i.e.* the gloom of sorrow: grief).

WIND AND WAVE.

I.

THE DAN-NAN-RON.

When Anne Gillespie, that was my friend in Eilanmore, left the island after the death of her uncle, the old man Robert Achanna, it was to go far west.

Among the men of the outer isles who for three summers past had been at the fishing off Eilanmore, there was one named Mànus MacCodrum. He was a fine lad to see, but though most of the fisher-folk of the Lewis and North Uist are fair, either with reddish hair and grey eyes or blue-eyed and yellow-haired, he was of a brown skin with dark hair and dusky brown eyes. He was, however, as unlike to the dark Celts of Arran and the Inner Hebrides as to the Northmen. He came of his people, sure enough. All the MacCodrums of North Uist had been brown-skinned and brown-haired

and brown-eyed; and herein may have lain the reason why, in bygone days, this small clan of Uist was known throughout the Western Isles as the *Sliochd-nan-Ròn*, the offspring of the Seals.

Not so tall as most of the men of North Uist and the Lews, Mànus MacCodrum was of a fair height and supple and strong. No man was a better fisherman than he, and he was well-liked of his fellows, for all the morose gloom that was upon him at times. He had a voice as sweet as a woman's when he sang, and he sang often, and knew all the old runes of the islands, from the Obb of Harris to the Head of Mingulay. Often, too, he chanted the beautiful *orain spioradail* of the Catholic priests and Christian Brothers of South Uist and Barra, though where he lived in North Uist he was the sole man who adhered to the ancient faith.

It may have been because Anne was a Catholic too, though, sure, the Achannas were so also, notwithstanding that their forebears and kindred in Galloway were Protestant (and this because of old Robert Achanna's love for his wife, who was of the old Faith, so it is said)—it may have been for this reason, though I think her lover's admiring eyes and soft speech and sweet singing had more to do with it, that she pledged her troth to Mànus. It was a south wind for him, as the saying is; for with her rippling brown hair and soft

grey eyes and cream-white skin, there was no comelier lass in the Isles.

So when Achanna was laid to his long rest, and there was none left upon Eilanmore save only his three youngest sons, Mànus MacCodrum sailed north-eastward across the Minch to take home his bride. Of the four eldest sons, Alastair had left Eilanmore some months before his father died, and sailed westward, though no one knew whither, or for what end, or for how long, and no word had been brought from him, nor was he ever seen again in the island, which had come to be called Eilan-nan-Allmharachain, the Isle of the Strangers. Allan and William had been drowned in a wild gale in the Minch; and Robert had died of the white fever, that deadly wasting disease which is the scourge of the Isles. Marcus was now "Eilanmore," and lived there with Gloom and Sheumais, all three unmarried, though it was rumoured among the neighbouring islanders that each loved Marsail nic Ailpean,* in Eilean-Rona of the Summer Isles, hard by the coast of Sutherland.

When Mànus asked Anne to go with him she agreed. The three brothers were ill-pleased at this, for apart from their not wishing their cousin to go so far away, they did not want to lose her, as she not only

* Marsail nic Ailpean is the Gaelic of which an English translation would be Marjory MacAlpine. *Nic* is a contraction for *nighean mhic*, "daughter of the line of."

cooked for them and did all that a woman does, including spinning and weaving, but was most sweet and fair to see, and in the long winter nights sang by the hour together, while Gloom played strange wild airs upon his *feadan,* a kind of oaten-pipe or flute.

She loved him, I know; but there was this reason also for her going, that she was afraid of Gloom. Often upon the moor or on the hill she turned and hastened home, because she heard the lilt and fall of that *feadan.* It was an eerie thing to her, to be going through the twilight when she thought the three men were in the house smoking after their supper, and suddenly to hear beyond and coming towards her the shrill song of that oaten flute playing "The Dance of the Dead," or "The Flow and Ebb," or "The Shadow-Reel."

That, sometimes at least, he knew she was there was clear to her, because as she stole rapidly through the tangled fern and gale she would hear a mocking laugh follow her like a leaping thing.

Mànus was not there on the night when she told Marcus and his brothers that she was going. He was in the haven on board the *Luath,* with his two mates, he singing in the moonshine as all three sat mending their fishing gear.

After the supper was done, the three brothers sat smoking and talking over an offer that had been made about some Shetland sheep. For a time Anne watched

them in silence. They were not like brothers, she thought. Marcus, tall, broad-shouldered, with yellow hair and strangely dark blue-black eyes and black eyebrows; stern, with a weary look on his sun-brown face. The light from the peats glinted upon the tawny curve of thick hair that trailed from his upper lip, for he had the *caisean-feusag* of the Northmen. Gloom, slighter of build, dark of hue and hair, but with hairless face; with thin, white, long-fingered hands, that had ever a nervous motion as though they were tide-wrack. There was always a frown on the centre of his forehead, even when he smiled with his thin lips and dusky, unbetraying eyes. He looked what he was, the brain of the Achannas. Not only did he have the English as though native to that tongue, but could and did read strange unnecessary books. Moreover, he was the only son of Robert Achanna to whom the old man had imparted his store of learning; for Achanna had been a schoolmaster in his youth in Galloway, and he had intended Gloom for the priesthood. His voice, too, was low and clear, but cold as pale-green water running under ice. As for Sheumais, he was more like Marcus than Gloom, though not so fair. He had the same brown hair and shadowy hazel eyes, the same pale and smooth face, with something of the same intent look which characterised the long-time missing and probably dead eldest brother, Alastair. He, too, was tall and gaunt. On Sheumais' face there was

that indescribable, as to some of course imperceptible, look which is indicated by the phrase, "the dusk of the shadow," though few there are who know what they mean by that, or, knowing, are fain to say.

Suddenly, and without any word or reason for it, Gloom turned and spoke to her.

"Well, Anne, and what is it?"

"I did not speak, Gloom."

"True for you, *mo cailinn*. But it's about to speak you were."

"Well, and that is true. Marcus, and you Gloom, and you Sheumais, I have that to tell which you will not be altogether glad for the hearing. 'Tis about . . . about . . . me and . . . and Mànus."

There was no reply at first. The three brothers sat looking at her, like the kye at a stranger on the moorland. There was a deepening of the frown on Gloom's brow, but when Anne looked at him his eyes fell and dwelt in the shadow at his feet. Then Marcus spoke in a low voice.

"Is it Mànus MacCodrum you will be meaning?"

"Aye, sure."

Again, silence. Gloom did not lift his eyes, and Sheumais was now staring at the peats. Marcus shifted uneasily.

"And what will Mànus MacCodrum be wanting?"

"Sure, Marcus, you know well what I mean. Why

do you make this thing hard for me? There is but one thing he would come here wanting; and he has asked me if I will go with him, and I have said yes. And if you are not willing that he come again with the minister, or that we go across to the kirk in Berneray of Uist in the Sound of Harris, then I will not stay under this roof another night, but will go away from Eilan-more at sunrise in the *Luath,* that is now in the haven. And that is for the hearing and knowing, Marcus and Gloom and Sheumais!"

Once more, silence followed her speaking. It was broken in a strange way. Gloom slipped his *feadan* into his hands, and so to his mouth. The clear cold notes of the flute filled the flame-lit room. It was as though white polar birds were drifting before the coming of snow.

The notes slid into a wild remote air: cold moon-light on the dark o' the sea, it was. It was the *Dàn-nan-Ròn.*

Anne flushed, trembled, and then abruptly rose. As she leaned on her clenched right hand upon the table, the light of the peats showed that her eyes were aflame.

"Why do you play *that,* Gloom Achanna?"

The man finished the bar, then blew into the oaten pipe, before, just glancing at the girl, he replied:

"And what harm will there be in *that,* Anna-ban?"

"You know it is harm. That is the Dàn-nan-Ròn!"

"Aye; and what then, Anna-ban?"

"What then? Are you thinking I don't know what you mean by playing the Song of the Seal?"

With an abrupt gesture Gloom put the *feadan* aside. As he did so, he rose.

"See here, Anne," he began roughly—when Marcus intervened.

"That will do just now, Gloom. Ann-à-ghraidh, do you mean that you are going to do this thing?"

"Aye, sure."

"Do you know why Gloom played the Dàn-nan-Ròn!"

"It was a cruel thing."

"You know what is said in the isles about . . . about . . . this or that man, who is under *gheasan*—who is spell-bound . . . and . . . and . . . about the seals and . . ."

"Yes, Marcus, it is knowing it that I am: *'Tha iad a' cantuinn gur h-e daoine fo gheasan a th' anns no roin.'* "

"*'They say that seals,'* " he repeated slowly; "*'they say that seals are men under magic spells.'* And have you ever pondered that thing, Anne, my cousin?"

"I am knowing well what you mean."

"Then you will know that the MacCodrums of North Uist are called the Sliochd-nan-ròn?"

"I have heard."

"And would you be for marrying a man that is of the race of the beasts, and himself knowing what *geas* means, and who may any day go back to his people?"

"Ah, now, Marcus, sure it is making a mock of me you are. Neither you nor any here believes that foolish thing. How can a man born of a woman be a seal, even though his *sinnsear* were the offspring of the sea-people,—which is not a saying I am believing either, though it may be: and not that it matters much, whatever, about the far-back forebears."

Marcus frowned darkly, and at first made no response. At last he answered, speaking sullenly.

"You may be believing this or you may be believing that, Anna-nic-Gilleasbuig, but two things are as well known as that the east wind brings the blight and the west wind the rain. And one is this: that long ago a Seal-man wedded a woman of North Uist, and that he or his son was called Neil MacCodrum; and that the sea-fever of the seal was in the blood of his line ever after. And this is the other: that twice within the memory of living folk a MacCodrnm has taken upon himself the form of a seal, and has so met his death—once Neil MacCodrum of Ru' Tormaid, and once Anndra MacCodrum of Berneray in the Sound. There's talk of others, but these are known of us all. And you will not be forgetting now that Neil-donn was the grand-

father, and that Anndra was the brother of the father of Mànus MacCodrum?"

"I am not caring what you say, Marcus: it is all foam of the sea."

"There's no foam without wind or tide, Anne. An' it's a dark tide that will be bearing you away to Uist; and a black wind that will be blowing far away behind the East, the wind that will be carrying his death-cry to your ears."

The girl shuddered. The brave spirit in her, however, did not quail.

"Well, so be it. To each his fate. But, seal or no seal, I am going to wed Mànus MacCodrum, who is a man as good as any here, and a true man at that, and the man I love, and that will be my man, God willing, the praise be His!"

Again Gloom took up the *feadan,* and sent a few cold white notes floating through the hot room, breaking suddenly into the wild fantastic opening air of the Dàn-nan-Ròn.

With a low cry and passionate gesture Anne sprang forward, snatchcd the oat-flute from his grasp, and would have thrown it in the fire. Marcus held her in an iron grip, however.

"Don't you be minding Gloom, Anne," he said quietly, as he took the *feadan* from her hand, and

handed it to his brother; "sure, he's only telling you in *his* way what I am telling you in mine."

She shook herself free, and moved to the other side of the table. On the opposite wall hung the dirk which had belonged to old Achanna. This she unfastened. Holding it in her right hand, she faced the three men.

"On the cross of the dirk I swear I will be the woman of Mànus MacCodrum."

The brothers made no response. They looked at her fixedly.

"And by the cross of the dirk I swear that if any man come between me and Mànus, this dirk will be for his remembering in a certain hour of the day of the days."

As she spoke, she looked meaningly at Gloom, whom she feared more than Marcus or Sheumais.

"And by the cross of the dirk I swear that if evil come to Mànus, this dirk will have another sheath, and that will be my milkless breast: and by that token I now throw the old sheath in the fire."

As she finished, she threw the sheath onto the burning peats.

Gloom quietly lifted it, brushed off the sparks of flame as though they were dust, and put it in his pocket.

"And by the same token, Anne," he said, "your oaths will come to nought."

Rising, he made a sign to his brothers to follow. When they were outside he told Sheumais to return, and to keep Anne within, by peace if possible—by force if not. Briefly they discussed their plans, and then separated. While Sheumais went back, Marcus and Gloom made their way to the haven.

Their black figures were visible in the moonlight, but at first they were not noticed by the men on board the *Luath,* for Mànus was singing.

When the isleman stopped abruptly, one of his companions asked him jokingly if his song had brought a seal alongside, and bid him beware lest it was a woman of the sea-people.

His face darkened, but he made no reply. When the others listened, they heard the wild strain of the Dàn-nan-Ròn stealing through the moonshine. Staring against the shore, they could discern the two brothers.

"What will be the meaning of that?" asked one of the men uneasily.

"When a man comes instead of a woman," answered Mànus slowly, "the young corbies are astir in the nest."

So, it meant blood. Aulay MacNeill and Donull MacDonull put down their gear, rose, and stood waiting for what Mànus would do.

"Ho, there!" he cried.

"Ho-ro!"

"What will you be wanting, Eilanmore?"

"We are wanting a word of you, Mànus MacCodrum. Will you come ashore?"

"If you want a word of me, you can come to me."

"There is no boat here."

"I'll send the *bàta-beag*."

When he had spoken, Mànus asked Donull, the younger of his mates, a lad of seventeen, to row to the shore.

"And bring back no more than one man," he added, "whether it be Eilanmore himself or Gloom-mhic-Achanna."

The rope of the small boat was unfastened, and Donull rowed it swiftly through the moonshine. The passing of a cloud dusked the shore, but they saw him throw a rope for the guiding of the boat alongside the ledge of the landing-place; then the sudden darkening obscured the vision. Donull must be talking, they thought; for two or there minutes elapsed without sign: but at last the boat put off again, and with two figures only. Doubtless the lad had had to argue against the coming of both Marcus and Gloom.

This, in truth, was what Donull had done. But while he was speaking, Marcus was staring fixedly beyond him.

"Who is it that is there?" he asked; "there, in the stern?"

"There is no one there."

"I thought I saw the shadow of a man."

"Then it was my shadow, Eilanmore."

Achanna turned to his brother.

"I see a man's death there in the boat."

Gloom quailed for a moment, then laughed low.

"I see no death of a man sitting in the boat, Marcus; but if I did, I am thinking it would dance to the air of the Dàn-nan-Ròn, which is more than the wraith of you or me would do."

"It is not a wraith I was seeing, but the death of a man."

Gloom whispered, and his brother nodded sullenly. The next moment a heavy muffler was round Donull's mouth, and before he could resist, or even guess what had happened, he was on his face on the shore, bound and gagged. A minute later the oars were taken by Gloom, and the boat moved swiftly out of the inner haven.

As it drew near Mànus stared at it intently.

"That is not Donull that is rowing, Aulay!"

"No; it will be Gloom Achanna, I'm thinking."

MacCodrum started. If so, that other figure at the stern was too big for Donull. The cloud passed just as the boat came alongside. The rope was made secure, and then Marcus and Gloom sprang on board.

"Where is Donull MacDonull?" demanded Mànus sharply.

Marcus made no reply, so Gloom answered for him.

"He has gone up to the house with a message to Anna-nic-Gilleasbuig."

"And what will that message be?"

"That Mànus MacCodrum has sailed away from Eilanmore, and will not see her again."

MacCodrum laughed. It was a low, ugly laugh.

"Sure, Gloom Achanna, you should be taking that *feadan* of yours and playing the Codhail-nan-Pairtean, for I'm thinkin' the crabs are gathering about the rocks down below us, an' laughing wi' their claws."

"Well, and that is a true thing," Gloom replied, slowly and quietly. "Yes, for sure I might, as you say, be playing the Meeting of the Crabs. Perhaps," he added, as by a sudden afterthought, "perhaps, though it is a calm night, you will be hearing the *comh-thonn*. The 'slapping of the waves' is a better thing to be hearing than the Meeting of the Crabs."

"If I hear the *comh-thonn,* it is not in the way you will be meaning, Gloom 'ic Achanna. 'Tis not the 'up sail and good-bye' they will be saying, but 'Home wi' the Bride.'"

Here Marcus intervened.

"Let us be having no more words, Mànus MacCodrum. The girl Anne is not for you. Gloom is to be

her man. So get you hence. If you will be going quiet, it is quiet we will be. If you have your feet on this thing, then you will be having that too which I saw in the boat."

"And what was it you saw in the boat, Achanna?"

"The death of a man."

"So . . . And now" (this after a prolonged silence, wherein the four men stood facing each other), "is it a blood-matter, if not of peace?"

"Aye. Go, if you are wise. If not, 'tis your own death you will be making."

There was a flash as of summer lightning. A bluish flame seemed to leap through the moonshine. Marcus reeled, with a gasping cry; then, leaning back till his face blanched in the moonlight, his knees gave way. As he fell, he turned half round. The long knife which Mànus had hurled at him had not penetrated his breast more than an inch at most, but as he fell on the deck it was driven into him up to the hilt.

In the blank silence that followed, the three men could hear a sound like the ebb-tide in sea-weed. It was the gurgling of the bloody froth in the lungs of the dead man.

The first to speak was his brother, and then only when thin reddish-white foam-bubbles began to burst from the blue lips of Marcus.

"It is murder."

He spoke low, but it was like the surf of breakers in the ears of those who heard.

"You have said one part of a true word, Gloom Achanna. It is murder . . . that you and he came for."

"The death of Marcus Achanna is on you, Mànus MacCodrum."

"So be it, as between yourself and me, or between all of your blood and me; though Aulay MacNeill as well as you can witness that, though in self-defence I threw the knife at Achanna, it was his own doing that drove it into him."

"You can whisper that to the rope when it is round your neck."

"And what will *you* be doing now, Gloom-nic-Achanna?"

For the first time Gloom shifted uneasily. A swift glance revealed to him the awkward fact, that the boat trailed behind the *Luath,* so that he could not leap into it; while if he turned to haul it close by the rope, he was at the mercy of the two men.

"I will go in peace," he said quietly.

"Aye," was the answer, in an equally quiet tone: "in the white peace."

Upon this menace of death the two men stood facing each other.

Achanna broke the silence at last.

"You'll hear the Dàn-nan-Ròn the night before you die, Mànus MacCodrum: and, lest you doubt it, you'll hear it again in your death-hour."

"*Ma tha sìn an Dàn*—if that be ordained." Mànus spoke gravely. His very quietude, however, boded ill. There was no hope of clemency. Gloom knew that.

Suddenly he laughed scornfully. Then, pointing with his right hand as if to someone behind his two adversaries, he cried out: "Put the death-hand on them, Marcus! Give them the Grave!"

Both men sprang aside, the heart of each nigh upon bursting. The death-touch of the newly slain is an awful thing to incur, for it means that the wraith can transfer all its evil to the person touched.

The next moment there was a heavy splash. Mànus realised that it was no more than a ruse, and that Gloom had escaped. With feverish haste he hauled in the small boat, leaped into it, and began at once to row so as to intercept his enemy.

Achanna rose once, between him and the *Luath*. MacCodrum crossed the oars in the thole-pins, and seized the boat-hook.

The swimmer kept straight for him. Suddenly he dived. In a flash, Mànus knew that Gloom was going to rise under the boat, seize the keel, and upset him, and thus probably be able to grip him from above. There was time and no more to leap: and, indeed,

scarce had he plunged into the sea ere the boat swung right over, Achanna clambering over it the next moment.

At first Gloom could not see where his foe was. He crouched on the upturned craft, and peered eagerly into the moonlit water. All at once a black mass shot out of the shadow between him and the smack. This black mass laughed: the same low, ugly laugh that had preceded the death of Marcus.

He who was in turn the swimmer was now close. When a fathom away he leaned back and began to tread water steadily. In his right hand he grasped the boat-hook. The man in the boat knew that to stay where he was meant certain death. He gathered himself together like a crouching cat. Mànus kept treading the water slowly, but with the hook ready so that the sharp iron spike at the end of it should transfix his foe if he came at him with a leap. Now and again he laughed. Then in his low sweet voice, but brokenly at times, between his deep breathings, he began to sing:

The tide was dark an' heavy with the burden that it bore,
I heard it talkin', whisperin', upon the weedy shore:
Each wave that stirred the sea-weed was like a closing door,
'Tis closing doors they hear at last who hear no more, no more,
My Grief,
No more!

The tide was in the salt sea-weed, and like a knife it tore;
The wild sea-wind went moaning, sooing, moaning o'er and o'er;
The deep sea-heart was brooding deep upon its ancient lore,
I heard the sob, the sooing sob, the dying sob at its core,
My Grief,
Its core!

The white sea-waves were wan and grey, its ashy lips before,
The yeast within its ravening mouth was red with streaming gore—
Oh red sea-weed, Oh red sea-waves, Oh hollow baffled roar,
Since one thou hast, Oh dark, dim sea, why callest thou for more,
My Grief,
For more!

In the quiet moonlight the chant, with its long slow cadences, sung as no other man in the Isles could sing it, sounded sweet and remote beyond words to tell. The glittering shine was upon the water of the haven, and moved in waving lines of fire along the stone ledges. Sometimes a fish rose, and spilt a ripple of pale gold; or a sea-nettle swam to the surface, and turned its blue or greenish globe of living jelly to the moon dazzle.

The man in the water made a sudden stop in his treading, and listened intently. Then once more the phosphorescent light gleamed about his slow-moving shoulders. In a louder chanting voice came once again,

Each wave that stirs the sea-weed is like a closing door,
'Tis closing doors they hear at last who hear no more, no more,
My Grief,
No more!

Yes, his quick ears had caught the inland strain of a voice he knew. Soft and white as the moonshine came Anne's singing, as she passed along the corrie leading to the haven. In vain his travelling gaze sought her: she was still in the shadow, and, besides, a slow drifting cloud obscured the moonlight. When he looked back again, a stifled exclamation came from his lips. There was not a sign of Gloom Achanna. He had slipped noiselessly from the boat, and was now either behind it, or had dived beneath it, or was swimming under water this way or that. If only the cloud would sail by, muttered Mànus, as he held himself in readiness for an attack from beneath or behind. As the dusk lightened, he swam slowly towards the boat, and then swiftly round it. There was no one there. He climbed onto the keel, and stood, leaning forward as a salmon-leisterer by torchlight, with his spear-pointed boat-hook raised. Neither below nor beyond could he discern any shape. A whispered call to Aulay MacNeill showed that he, too, saw nothing. Gloom must have swooned, and sank deep as he slipped through the water. Perhaps the dog-fish were already darting about him.

Going behind the boat, Mànus guided it back to the smack. It was not long before, with MacNeill's help, he righted the punt. One oar had drifted out of sight, but as there was a sculling hole in the stern, that did not matter.

"What shall we do with it?" he muttered, as he stood at last by the corpse of Marcus. "This is a bad night for us, Aulay!"

"Bad it is; but let us be seeing it is not worse. I'm thinking we should have left the boat."

"And for why that?"

"We could say that Marcus Achanna and Gloom Achanna left us again, and that we saw no more of them nor of our boat."

MacCodrum pondered awhile. The sound of voices, borne faintly across the water, decided him. Probably Anne and the lad Donull were talking. He slipped into the boat, and with a sail-knife soon ripped it here and there. It filled, and then, heavy with the weight of a great ballast-stone which Aulay had first handed to his companion, and surging with a foot-thrust from the latter, it sank.

"We'll hide the . . . the man there . . . behind the windlass, below the spare sail, till we're out at sea, Aulay. Quick, give me a hand!"

It did not take the two men long to lift the corpse and do as Mànus had suggested. They had scarce accomplished this when Anne's voice came hailing silver-sweet across the water.

With death-white face and shaking limbs MacCodrum stood holding the mast, while with a loud voice so firm and strong that Aulay MacNeill smiled below his fear,

he asked if the Achannas were back yet, and, if so, for Donull to row out at once, and she with him if she would come.

It was nearly half-an-hour thereafter that Anne rowed out towards the *Luath*. She had gone at last along the shore to a creek where one of Marcus' boats was moored, and returned with it. Having taken Donull on board, she made way with all speed, fearful lest Gloom or Marcus should intercept her.

It did not take long to explain how she had laughed at Sheumais' vain efforts to detain her, and had come down to the haven. As she approached, she heard Mànus singing, and so had herself broken into a song she knew he loved. Then, by the water-edge, she had come upon Donull lying upon his back, bound and gagged. After she had released him, they waited to see what would happen, but as in the moonlight they could not see any small boat come in—bound to or from the smack—she had hailed to know if Mànus were there.

On his side, he said briefly that the two Achannas had come to persuade him to leave without her. On his refusal, they had departed again, uttering threats against her as well as himself. He heard their quarrelling voices as they rowed into the gloom, but could not see them at last because of the obscured moonlight.

"And now, Ann-mochree," he added, "is it coming with me you are, and just as you are? Sure, you'll

never repent it, and you'll have all you want that I can give. Dear of my heart, say that you will be coming away this night of the nights! By the Black Stone on Icolmkill I swear it, and by the Sun, and by the Moon, and by Himself!"

"I am trusting you, Mànus dear. Sure, it is not for me to be going back to that house after what has been done and said. I go with you, now and always, God save us."

"Well, dear lass o' my heart, it's farewell to Eilanmore it is, for by the Blood on the Cross I'll never land on it again!"

"And that will be no sorrow to me, Mànus my home!"

And this was the way that my friend Anne Gillespie left Eilanmore to go to the isles of the west.

It was a fair sailing in the white moonshine with a whispering breeze astern. Anne leaned against Mànus, dreaming her dream. The lad Donull sat drowsing at the helm. Forward, Aulay MacNeill, with his face set against the moonshine to the west, brooded dark.

Though no longer was land in sight, and there was peace among the deeps of the quiet stars and upon the sea, the shadow of fear was upon the face of Mànus MacCodrum.

This might well have been because of the as yet un-

buried dead that lay beneath the spare sail by the windlass. The dead man, however, did not affright him. What went moaning in his heart, and sighing and calling in his brain, was a faint falling echo he had heard as the *Luath* glided slow out of the haven. Whether from the water or from the shore he could not tell, but he heard the wild fantastic air of the Dàn-nan-Ròn, as he had heard it that very night upon the *feadan* of Gloom Achanna.

It was his hope that his ears had played him false. When he glanced about him and saw the sombre flame in the eyes of Aulay MacNeill, staring at him out of the dusk, he knew that which Oisìn, the son of Fionn, cried in his pain: "his soul swam in mist."

II.

For all the evil omens, the marriage of Anne and Mànus MacCodrum went well. He was more silent than of yore, and men avoided rather than sought him; but he was happy with Anne, and content with his two mates, who were now Callum MacCodrum and Ranald MacRanald. The youth Donull had bettered himself by joining a Skye skipper, who was a kinsman; and Aulay MacNeill had surprised everyone except Mànus by going away as a seaman on board one of the *Loch* line of ships which sail for Australia from the Clyde.

Anne never knew what had happened, though it is possible she suspected somewhat. All that was known to her was that Marcus and Gloom Achanna had disappeared, and were supposed to have been drowned. There was now no Achanna upon Eilanmore, for Sheumais had taken a horror of the place and his loneliness. As soon as it was commonly admitted that his two brothers must have drifted out to sea, and been drowned, or at best picked up by some ocean-going ship, he disposed of the island-farm, and left Eilanmore for ever. All this confirmed the thing said among the islanders of the West—that old Robert Achanna had brought a curse with him. Blight and disaster had visited Eilanmore over and over in the many years he had held it, and death, sometimes tragic or mysterious, had overtaken six of his seven sons, while the youngest bore upon his brows the "dusk of the shadow." True, none knew for certain that three out of the six were dead, but few for a moment believed in the possibility that Alastair and Marcus and Gloom were alive. On the night when Anne had left the island with Mànus MacCodrum he, Sheumais, had heard nothing to alarm him. Even when, an hour after she had gone down to the haven, neither she nor his brothers had returned, and the *Luath* had put out to sea, he was not in fear of any ill. Clearly, Marcus and Gloom had gone away in the smack, perhaps determined to see that the girl was duly married

by priest or minister. He would have perturbed himself little for days to come, but for a strange thing that happened that night. He had returned to the house because of a chill that was upon him, and convinced, too, that all had sailed in the *Luath*. He was sitting brooding by the peat fire, when he was startled by a sound at the window at the back of the room. A few bars of a familiar air struck painfully upon his ear, though played so low that they were just audible. What could it be but the Dàn-nan-Ròn; and who would be playing that but Gloom? What did it mean? Perhaps, after all, it was fantasy only, and there was no *feadan* out there in the dark. He was pondering this when, still low, but louder and sharper than before, there rose and fell the strain which he hated, and Gloom never played before him, that of the Dàvsa-na-mairv, the Dance of the Dead. Swiftly and silently he rose and crossed the room. In the dark shadows cast by the byre he could see nothing; but the music ceased. He went out, and searched everywhere, but found no one. So he returned, took down the Holy Book, and with awed heart read slowly, till peace came upon him, soft and sweet as the warmth of the peat-glow.

But as for Anne, she had never even this hint that one of the supposed dead might be alive; or that, being dead, Gloom might yet touch a shadowy *feadan* into a wild, remote air of the Grave.

When month after month went by, and no hint of ill came to break upon their peace, Mànus grew light-hearted again. Once more his songs were heard as he came back from the fishing or loitered ashore mending his nets. A new happiness was nigh to them, for Anne was with child. True, there was fear also, for the girl was not well at the time when her labour was near, and grew weaker daily. There came a day when Mànus had to go to Loch Boisdale in South Uist; and it was with pain, and something of foreboding, that he sailed away from Berneray in the Sound of Harris, where he lived. It was on the third night that he returned. He was met by Katreen MacRanald, the wife of his mate, with the news that, on the morrow after his going, Anne had sent for the priest, who was staying at Loch Maddy, for she had felt the coming of death. It was that very evening she died, and took the child with her.

Mànus heard as one in a dream. It seemed to him that the tide was ebbing in his heart, and a cold sleety rain falling, falling through a mist in his brain.

Sorrow lay heavily upon him. After the earthing of her whom he loved he went to and fro solitary; often crossing the Narrows and going to the old Pictish Tower under the shadow of Ben Breac. He would not go upon the sea, but let his kinsman Callum do as he liked with the *Luath*.

Now and again Father Allan MacNeill sailed north-

ward to see him. Each time he departed sadder. "The man is going mad, I fear," he said to Callum, the last time he saw Mànus.

The long summer nights brought peace and beauty to the isles. It was a great herring-year, and the moon-fishing was unusually good. All the Uist men who lived by the sea-harvest were in their boats whenever they could. The pollack, the dogfish, the otters, and the seals, with flocks of sea-fowl beyond number, shared in the common joy. Mànus MacCodrum alone paid no heed to herring or mackerel. He was often seen striding along the shore, and more than once had been heard laughing. Sometimes, too, he was come upon at low tide by the great Reef of Berneray, singing wild strange runes and songs, or crouching upon a rock and brooding dark.

The midsummer moon found no man on Berneray except MacCodrum, the Reverend Mr. Black, the minister of the Free Kirk, and an old man named Anndra McIan. On the night before the last day of the middle month, Anndra was reproved by the minister for saying that he had seen a man rise out of one of the graves in the kirkyard, and steal down by the stone-dykes towards Balnahunnur-sa-mona,* where Mànus MacCodrum lived.

"The dead do not rise and walk, Anndra."

* *Baille-'na-aonar'sa mhonadh*, "the solitary farm on the hill-slope."

"That may be, maighstir; but it may have been the Watcher of the Dead. Sure, it is not three weeks since Padruic McAlistair was laid beneath the green mound. He'll be wearying for another to take his place."

"Hoots, man, that is an old superstition. The dead do not rise and walk, I tell you."

"It is right you may be, maighstir; but I heard of this from my father, that was old before you were young, and from his father before him. When the last buried is weary with being the Watcher of the Dead he goes about from place to place till he sees man, woman, or child with the death-shadow in the eyes, and then he goes back to his grave and lies down in peace, for his vigil it will be over now."

The minister laughed at the folly, and went into his house to make ready for the Sacrament that was to be on the morrow. Old Anndra, however, was uneasy. After the porridge he went down through the gloaming to Balnahunnur-sa-mona. He meant to go in and warn Màrus MacCodrum. But when he got to the west wall, and stood near the open window, he heard Màrus speaking in a loud voice, though he was alone in the room.

*"B'ionganntach do ghràdh dhomhsa, a' toirt barrachd air gràdh nam ban! . . ."**

* "Thy love to me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women."

This Mànus cried in a voice quivering with pain. Anndra stopped still, fearful to intrude, fearful also, perhaps, to see someone there beside MacCodrum whom eyes should not see. Then the voice rose into a cry of agony.

*"Aoram dhuit, ay an déigh dhomh fàs aosda!"**

With that Anndra feared to stay. As he passed the byre he started, for he thought he saw the shadow of a man. When he looked closer he could see nought, so went his way trembling and sore troubled.

It was dusk when Mànus came out. He saw that it was to be a cloudy night, and perhaps it was this that, after a brief while, made him turn in his aimless walk and go back to the house. He was sitting before the flaming heart of the peats, brooding in his pain, when, suddenly, he sprang to his feet.

Loud and clear, and close as though played under the very window of the room, came the cold white notes of an oaten flute. Ah, too well he knew that wild fantastic air. Who could it be but Gloom Achanna, playing upon his *feadan;* and what air of all airs could that be but the Dàn-nan-Ròn?

Was it the dead man, standing there unseen in the shadow of the grave? Was Marcus beside him—Marcus with the knife still thrust up to the hilt, and the lung-foam upon his lips? Can the sea give up its dead?

* "I shall worship thee, aye even after I have become old."

Can there be strain of any *feadan* that ever was made of man—there in the Silence?

In vain Mànus MacCodrum tortured himself thus. Too well he knew that he had heard the Dàn-nan-Ròn, and that no other than Gloom Achanna was the player.

Suddenly an access of fury wrought him to madness. With an abrupt lilt the tune swung into the Davsà-na-mairv, and thence, after a few seconds, and in a moment, into that mysterious and horrible *Codhail-nan-Pairtean* which none but Gloom played.

There could be no mistake now, nor as to what was meant by the muttering, jerking air of the "Gathering of the Crabs."

With a savage cry Mànus snatched up a long dirk from its place by the chimney, and rushed out.

There was not the shadow of a sea-gull even in front: so he sped round by the byre. Neither was anything unusual discoverable there.

"Sorrow upon me," he cried; "man or wraith, I will be putting it to the dirk!"

But there was no one; nothing; not a sound.

Then, at last, with a listless droop of his arms, MacCodrum turned and went into the house again. He remembered what Gloom Achanna had said: *"You'll hear the Dàn-nan-Ròn the night before you die, Mànus MacCodrum, and lest you doubt it, you'll hear it in your death-hour."*

He did not stir from the fire for three hours; then he rose, and went over to his bed and lay down without undressing.

He did not sleep, but lay listening and watching. The peats burned low, and at last there was scarce a flicker along the floor. Outside he could hear the wind moaning upon the sea. By a strange rustling sound he knew that the tide was ebbing across the great reef that runs out from Berneray. By midnight the clouds had gone. The moon shone clear and full. When he heard the clock strike in its worm-eaten, rickety case, he sat up, and listened intently. He could hear nothing. No shadow stirred. Surely if the wraith of Gloom Achanna were waiting for him it would make some sign, now, in the dead of night.

An hour passed. Mànus rose, crossed the room on tiptoe, and soundlessly opened the door. The salt wind blew fresh against his face. The smell of the shore, of wet sea-wrack and pungent bog-myrtle, of foam and moving water, came sweet to his nostrils. He heard a skua calling from the rocky promontory. From the slopes behind, the wail of a moon-restless lapwing rose and fell mournfully.

Crouching, and with slow, stealthy step, he stole round by the seaward wall. At the dyke he stopped, and scrutinised it on each side. He could see for several hundred yards, and there was not even a shelter-

ing sheep. Then, soundlessly as ever, he crept close to the byre. He put his ear to chink after chink; but not a stir of a shadow even. As a shadow, himself, he drifted lightly to the front, past the hay-rick: then, with swift glances to right and left, opened the door and entered. As he did so, he stood as though frozen. Surely, he thought, that was a sound as of a step, out there by the hay-rick. A terror was at his heart. In front, the darkness of the byre, with God knows what dread thing awaiting him: behind, a mysterious walker in the night, swift to take him unawares. The trembling that came upon him was nigh overmastering. At last, with a great effort, he moved towards the ledge, where he kept a candle. With shaking hand he struck a light. The empty byre looked ghostly and fearsome in the flickering gloom. But there was no one, nothing. He was about to turn, when a rat ran along a loose hanging beam, and stared at him, or at the yellow shine. He saw its black eyes shining like peat-water in moonlight.

The creature was curious at first, then indifferent. At least, it began to squeak, and then make a swift scratching with its forepaws. Once or twice came an answering squeak: a faint rustling was audible here and there among the straw.

With a sudden spring Mànus seized the beast. Even in the second in which he raised it to his mouth, and

scrunched its back with his strong teeth, it bit him severely. He let his hands drop, and grope furtively in the darkness. With stooping head he shook the last breath out of the rat, holding it with his front teeth, with back-curled lips. The next moment he dropped the dead thing, trampled upon it, and burst out laughing. There was a scurrying of pattering feet, a rustling of straw. Then silence again. A draught from the door had caught the flame and extinguished it. In the silence and darkness MacCodrum stood, intent but no longer afraid. He laughed again, because it was so easy to kill with the teeth. The noise of his laughter seemed to him to leap hither and thither like a shadowy ape. He could see it: a blackness within the darkness. Once more he laughed. It amused him to see the *thing* leaping about like that.

Suddenly he turned, and walked out into the moonlight. The lapwing was still circling and wailing. He mocked it, with loud, shrill *pēē-wēēty, pēē-wēēty, pēē-wēēt.* The bird swung waywardly, alarmed: its abrupt cry, and dancing flight, aroused its fellows. The air was full of the lamentable crying of plovers.

A sough of the sea came inland. Mànus inhaled its breath with a sigh of delight. A passion for the running wave was upon him. He yearned to feel green water break against his breast. Thirst and hunger, too, he felt at last, though he had known neither all day.

How cool and sweet, he thought, would be a silver haddock, or even a brown-backed liath, alive and gleaming wet with the sea-water still bubbling in its gills. It would writhe, just like the rat; but then how he would throw his head back, and toss the glittering thing up into the moonlight, catch it on the downwhirl just as it neared the wave on whose crest he was, and then devour it with swift voracious gulps!

With quick jerky steps he made his way past the landward side of the small thatch-roofed cottage. He was about to enter, when he noticed that the door, which he had left ajar, was closed. He stole to the window and glanced in.

A single thin, wavering moonbeam flickered in the room. But the flame at the heart of the peats had worked its way through the ash, and there was now a dull glow, though that was within the "smooring," and threw scarce more than a glimmer into the room.

There was enough light, however, for Mànus MacCodrum to see that a man sat on the three-legged stool before the fire. His head was bent, as though he were listening. The face was away from the window. It was his own wraith, of course—of that Mànus felt convinced. What was it doing there? Perhaps it had eaten the Holy Book, so that it was beyond his putting a *rosad* on it! At the thought, he laughed loud. The shadow-man leaped to his feet.

The next moment MacCodrum swung himself onto the thatched roof, and clambered from rope to rope, where these held down the big stones which acted as dead-weight for the thatch against the fury of tempests. Stone after stone he tore from its fastenings, and hurled to the ground over and beyond the door. Then, with tearing hands, he began to burrow an opening in the thatch. All the time he whined like a beast.

He was glad the moon shone full upon him. When he had made a big enough hole, he would see the evil thing out of the grave that sat in his room, and would stone it to death.

Suddenly he became still. A cold sweat broke out upon him. The *thing,* whether his own wraith, or the spirit of his dead foe, or Gloom Achanna himself, had begun to play, low and slow, a wild air. No piercing cold music like that of the *feadan!* Too well he knew it, and those cool white notes that moved here and there in the darkness like snowflakes. As for the air, though he slept till Judgment Day and heard but a note of it amidst all the clamour of heaven and hell, sure he would scream because of the Dàn-nan-Ròn!

The Dàn-nan-Ròn: the *Roin!* the Seals! Ah, what was he doing there, on the bitter-weary land! Out there was the sea. Safe would he be in the green waves.

With a leap he was on the ground. Seizing a huge stone he hurled it through the window. Then, laughing

and screaming, he fled towards the Great Reef, along whose sides the ebb-tide gurgled and sobbed, with glistering white foam.

He ceased screaming or laughing as he heard the Dàn-nan-Ròn behind him, faint, but following; sure, following. Bending low, he raced towards the rock-ledges from which ran the reef.

When at last he reached the extreme ledge, he stopped abruptly. Out on the reef he saw from ten to twenty seals, some swimming to and fro, others clinging to the reef, one or two making a curious barking sound, with round heads lifted against the moon. In one place there was a surge and lashing of water. Two bulls were fighting to the death.

With swift stealthy movements Mànus unclothed himself. The damp had clotted the leathern thongs of his boots, and he snarled with curled lip as he tore at them. He shone white in the moonshine, but was sheltered from the sea by the ledge behind which he crouched. "What did Gloom Achanna mean by that," he muttered savagely, as he heard the nearing air change into the "Dance of the Dead." For a moment Mànus was a man again. He was nigh upon turning to face his foe, corpse or wraith or living body, to spring at this thing which followed him, and tear it with hands and teeth. Then, once more, the hated Song of the Seal stole mockingly through the night.

With a shiver he slipped into the dark water. Then, with quick, powerful strokes, he was in the moon-flood, and swimming hard against it out by the leeside of the reef.

So intent were the seals upon the fight of the two great bulls that they did not see the swimmer, or, if they did, took him for one of their own people. A savage snarling and barking and half-human crying came from them. Mànus was almost within reach of the nearest, when one of the combatants sank dead, with torn throat. The victor clambered onto the reef, and leaned high, swaying its great head and shoulders to and fro. In the moonlight its white fangs were like red coral. Its blinded eyes ran with gore.

There was a rush, a rapid leaping and swirling, as Mànus surged in among the seals, which were swimming round the place where the slain bull had sunk.

The laughter of this long white seal terrified them.

When his knee struck against a rock, MacCodrum groped with his arms and hauled himself out of the water.

From rock to rock and ledge to ledge he went, with a fantastic dancing motion, his body gleaming foam-white in the moonshine.

As he pranced and trampled along the weedy ledges, he sang snatches of an old rune—the lost rune of the MacCodrums of Uist. The seals on the rocks

crouched spell-bound: those slow-swimming in the water stared with brown unwinking eyes, with their small ears strained against the sound:—

It is I, Mànus MacCodrum,
I am telling you that, you, Anndra of my blood,
And you, Neil my grandfather, and you, and you, and you!
Aye, aye, Mànus my name is, Mànus MacMànus!
It is I myself, and no other,
Your brother, Oh Seals of the Sea!
Give me blood of the red fish,
And a bite of the flying sgadan:
The green wave on my belly,
And the foam in my eyes!
I am your bull-brother, Oh Bulls of the Sea,
Bull-better than any of you, snarling bulls!
Come to me, mate, seal of the soft furry womb,
White am I still, though red shall I be,
Red with the streaming red blood if any dispute me!
Aoh, aoh, aoh, arò, arò, ho-rò!
A man was I, a seal am I,
My fangs churn the yellow foam from my lips:
Give way to me, give way to me, Seals of the Sea;
Give way, for I am fëy of the sea
And the sea-maiden I see there,
And my name, true, is Mànus MacCodrum,
The bull-seal that was a man, Arà! Arà!

By this time he was close upon the great black seal, which was still monotonously swaying its gory head, with its sightless eyes rolling this way and that. The sea-folk seemed fascinated. None moved, even when the dancer in the moonshine trampled upon them.

When he came within arm-reach he stopped.

"Are you the Ceann-Cinnidh?" he cried. "Are you the head of this clan of the seafolk?"

The huge beast ceased its swaying. Its curled lips moved from its fangs.

"Speak, Seal, if there's no curse upon you! Maybe, now, you'll be Anndra himself, the brother of my father! Speak! *H'st—are you hearing that music on the shore!* 'Tis the Dàn-nan-Ròn! Death o' my soul, it's the Dàn-nan-Ròn! Aha, 'tis Gloom Achanna out of the Grave. Back, beast, and let me move on!"

With that, seeing the great bull did not move, he struck it full in the face with clenched fist. There was a hoarse strangling roar, and the seal champion was upon him with lacerating fangs.

Mànus swayed this way and that. All he could hear now was the snarling and growling and choking cries of the maddened seals. As he fell, they closed in upon him. His screams wheeled through the night like mad birds. With desperate fury he struggled to free himself. The great bull pinned him to the rock; a dozen others tore at his white flesh, till his spouting blood made the rocks scarlet in the white shine of the moon.

For a few seconds he still fought savagely, tearing with teeth and hands. Once, only, a wild cry burst from his lips: when from the shore end of the reef came loud and clear the lilt of the rune of his fate.

The next moment he was dragged down and swept from the reef into the sea. As the torn and mangled body disappeared from sight, it was amid a seething crowd of leaping and struggling seals, their eyes wild with affright and fury, their fangs red with human gore.

And Gloom Achanna, turning upon the reef, moved swiftly inland, playing low on his *feadan* as he went.

BY THE YELLOW MOONROCK.

Rory MacAlpine the piper had come down the Strath, for the great wedding at the farm of his kinsman, Donald Macalister. Every man and woman, every boy and girl, who could by hook or by crook get to the big dance at the Barns was to be seen there: but no one that danced till he or she could dance no more had a wearier joy than Rory had with the pipes. Reels and strathspeys that everyone knew gave way at last to wilder reels and more intoxicating strathspeys that no one had ever heard before . . . and why should they, since it was the hill wind and the mountain torrent and the roar of pines that had got loose in Rory's mind, and he not knowing it any more than a leaf that sails on the yellow wind. But at last there was not in man, woman, boy or girl, nor in Rory himself, a breath left

for the breathing, as the saying is. The stars shone cold and still on the shadows that flitted silently or slowly stumbled towards the far homes. Rory himself went quietly away with his kinsman, to the rough-end of the farm beyond the barns, and was on a mattress on the floor of a big empty room, and snoring hard, long before Donald Macalister had put a bolt through the barn-door of the feast room, and gone round by the dark house where a single light welcomed him to his new joy.

An hour after midnight Rory woke with a start. He had "a spate of a headache on," he muttered, as he half rose and struck a match against the floor. When he saw that he was still in his brave gear, and had lain down "just as he was," and also remembered all that had happened and the place he was in, he wondered what had waked him.

Now that he thought of it, he had heard music: yes, for sure, music . . . for all that it was so late, and after everyone had gone home. What was it? It was not any song of his own, nor any air he had. He must have dreamed that it came across great lonely moors, and had a sigh and a laugh and a sudden cry in it.

He was cold. The window was open. That was a stupid, careless thing of Donald Macalister to do, and he sober, as he always was, though he could drink

deep; on a night of frost like this Death could slip in on the back of a shadow and get his whisper in your ear before you could rise for the stranger.

He stumbled to his feet and closed the window. Then he lay down again, and was nearly asleep, and was confused between an old prayer that rose in his mind like a sunken spar above a wave; and whether to take Widow Sheen a packet of great thick Sabbath peppermints, or a good heavy twist of tobacco; and a strange delightsome memory of Donald Macalister's brew of rum and lemons with a touch of old brandy in it; when again he heard that little, wailing, fantastic air, and sat up with the sweat on his brow.

The sweat was not there only because of the little thin music he heard, and it the same, too, as he had heard before; but because the window was wide open again, though the room was so heavy with silence that the pulse of his heart made a noise like a jumping rat.

Rory sat, as still as though he were dead, staring at the window. He could not make out whether the music was faint because it was so far away, or because it was played feebly, like a child's playing, just under the sill.

He was a big, strong man, but he leaned and wavered like the flame of a guttering candle in that slow journey of his from the mattress to the window. He could hear the playing now quite well. It was like the beautiful sweet song of "Bride bhoidheach muime

Chriosda," but with the holy peace out of it, and with a little, evil, hidden laugh flapping like a wing against the blessed name of Christ's foster-mother. But when it sounded under the window, it suddenly was far; and when it was far, the last circling peewit-lilt would be at his ear like a skiffing bat.

When he looked out, and felt the cold night lie on his skin, he could not see because he saw too well. He saw the shores of the sky filled with dancing lights, and the great lighthouse of the moon sending a foam-white stream across the delicate hazes of frost which were too thin to be seen, and only took the sharp edges off the stars, or sometimes splintered them into sudden dazzle. He was like a man in a sailless, rudderless boat, looking at the skies because he lay face upward and dared not stoop and look into the dark slipping water alongside.

He saw, too, the horn-like curve of Tom-na-shee black against the blueness, and the inky line of Dalmonadh Moor beyond the plumy mass of Dalibrog woods, and the near meadows where a leveret jumped squealing, and then the bare garden with ragged gooseberry-bushes like scraggy, forlorn hunched sheep, and at last the white gravel-walk bordered with the withered roots of pinks and southernwood.

Then he looked from all these great things and these little things to the ground beneath the window. There was nothing there. There was no sound. Not

even far away could he hear any faint devilish music. At least——

Rory shut the window, and went back to his mattress and lay down.

"By the sun an' wind," he exclaimed, "a man gets fear on him nowadays, like a cold in the head when a thaw comes."

Then he lay and whistled a blithe catch. For sure, he thought, he would rise at dawn and drown that thirst of his in whatever came first to hand.

Suddenly he stopped whistling, and on the uplift of a lilting turn. In a moment the room was full of old silence again.

Rory turned his head slowly. The window was wide open.

A sob died in his throat. He put his hands to his dry mouth; the back of it was wet with the sweat on his face.

White and shaking, he rose and walked steadily to the window. He looked out and down: there was no one, nothing.

He pulled the ragged cane chair to the sill, and sat there, silent and hopeless.

Soon big tears fell one by one, slowly, down his face. He understood now. His heart filled with sad, bitter grief, and brimmed over, and that was why the tears fell.

It was his hour that had come and opened the window.

He was cold, and as faint with hunger and heavy with thirst as though he had not put a glass to his lips or a bit to his mouth for days instead of for hours; but for all that, he did not feel ill, and he wondered and wondered why he was to die so soon, and he so well-made and handsome, and unmarried too, and now with girls as eager to have him as trouts for a may fly.

And after a time Rory began to dream of that great beauty that had troubled his dreams; and while he thought of it, and the beautiful sweet wonder of the woman who had it, she whom he had seen sitting in the moonshine on the yellow rock, he heard again the laughing crying fall and lilt of that near and far song. But now it troubled him no more.

He stooped, and swung himself out of the window, and at the noise of his feet on the gravel a dog barked. He saw a white hound running swiftly across the pasture beyond him. It was gone in a moment, so swiftly did it run. He heard a second bark, and knew that it came from the old deerhound in the kennel. He wondered where that white hound he had seen came from, and where it was going, and it silent and white and swift as a moonbeam, with head low and in full sleuth.

He put his hand on the sill, and climbed into the room again; lifted the pipes which he or Donald Maca-

lister had thrown down beside the mattress; and again, but stealthily, slipped out of the window.

Rory walked to the deerhound and spoke to it. The dog whimpered, but barked no more. When the piper walked on, and had gone about a score yards, the old hound threw back his head and gave howl upon howl, long and mournful. The cry went from stead to stead; miles and miles away the farm-dogs answered.

Perhaps it was to drown their noise that Rory began to finger his pipes, and at last let a long drone go out like a great humming cockchafer on the blue frosty stillness of the night. The crofters at Moor Edge heard his pibroch as he walked swiftly along the road that leads to Dalmonadh Moor. Some thought it was uncanny; some that one of the pipers had lost his way, or made an early start; one or two wondered if Rory M'Alpine were already on the move, like a hare that could not be long in one form.

The last house was the gamekeeper's, at Dalmonadh Toll, as it was still called. Duncan Grant related next day that he was wakened by the skreigh of the pipes, and knew them for Rory M'Alpine's by the noble masterly fashion in which drone and chanter gave out their music, and also because that music was the strong, wild, fearsome reel that Rory had played last in the byres, that which he had called "The Reel of the Daughter of Ivor."

"At that," he added, each time he told the tale, "I rose and opened the window, and called to M'Alpine. 'Rory,' I cried, 'is that you?'

"'Aye,' he said, stopping short, an' giving the pipes a lilt. 'Aye, it's me an' no other, Duncan Grant.'

"'I thought ye would be sleeping sound at Dalibrog?'

"But Rory made no answer to that, and walked on. I called to him in the English: 'Dinna go out on the moor, Rory! Come in, man, an' have a sup o' hot porridge an' a mouthful with them.' But he never turned his head; an' as it was cold an' dark, I said to myself that doited fools must gang their ain gate, an' so turned an' went to my bed again, though I hadn't a wink so long as I could hear Rory playing."

But Duncan Grant was not the last man who heard "The Reel of the Daughter of Ivor."

A mile or more across Dalmonadh Moor the heather-set road forks. One way is the cart-way to Balnaree; the other is the drover's way to Tom-na-shee and the hill countries beyond. It is up this, a mile from the fork, that the Yellow Moonrock rises like a great fang out of purple lips. Some say it is of granite, and some marble, and that it is an old cromlech of the forgotten days; others that it is an unknown substance, a meteoric stone believed to have fallen from the moon.

Not near the Moonrock itself, but five score yards or

more away, and perhaps more ancient still, there is a group of three lesser fang-shaped boulders of trap, one with illegible runic writing or signs. These are familiar to some as the Stannin' Stanes; to others, who have the Gaelic, as the Stone Men, or simply as the Stones, or the Stones of Dalmonadh. None knows anything certain of this ancient cromlech, though it is held by scholars to be of Pictish times.

Here a man known as Peter Lamont, though commonly as Peter the Tinker, an idle, homeless vagrant, had taken shelter from the hill-wind which had blown earlier in the night, and had heaped a bed of dry bracken. He was asleep when he heard the wail and hum of the pipes.

He sat up in the shadow of one of the Stones. By the stars he saw that it was still the black of the night, and that dawn would not be astir for three hours or more. Who could be playing the pipes in that lonely place at that hour?

The man was superstitious, and his fears were heightened by his ignorance of what the unseen piper played (and Peter the Tinker prided himself on his knowledge of pipe music) and by the strangeness of it. He remembered, too, where he was. There was not one in a hundred who would lie by night among the Stannin' Stanes, and he had himself been driven to it only by heavy weariness and fear of death from the unsheltered

cold. But not even that would have made him lie near the Moonrock. He shivered as memories of wild stories rose ghastly one after the other.

The music came nearer. The tinker crawled forward, and hid behind the Stone next the path, and cautiously, under a tuft of bracken, stared in the direction whence the sound came.

He saw a tall man striding along in full Highland gear, with his face death-white in the moonshine, and his eyes glazed like those of a leistered salmon. It was not till the piper was close that Lamont recognised him as Rory M'Alpine.

He would have spoken—and gladly, in that lonely place, to say nothing of the curiosity that was on him—had it not been for those glazed eyes and that set, death-white face. The man was fëy. He could see that. It was all he could do not to leap away like a rabbit.

Rory M'Alpine passed him, and played till he was close on the Moonrock. Then he stopped, and listened, leaning forward as though straining his eyes to see into the shadow.

He heard nothing, saw nothing, apparently. Slowly he waved a hand across the heather.

Then suddenly the piper began a rapid talking. Peter the Tinker could not hear what he said, perhaps because his own teeth chattered with the fear that was on him. Once or twice Rory stretched his arms, as

though he were asking something, as though he were pleading.

Suddenly he took a step or two forward, and in a loud, shrill voice cried—

"By Holy St. Bride, let there be peace between us, white woman!

"I do not fear you, white woman, because I too am of the race of Ivor:

"My father's father was the son of Ivor mhic Alpein, the son of Ivor the Dark, the son of Ivor Honeymouth, the son of Ruaridh, the son of Ruaridh the Red, of the straight unbroken line of Ivor the King:

"I will do you no harm, and you will do me no harm, white woman:

"This is the Day of Bride, the day for the daughter of Ivor. It is Rory M'Alpine who is here, of the race of Ivor. I will do you no harm, and you will do me no harm:

"Sure, now, it was you who sang. It was you who sang. It was you who played. It was you who opened my window:

"It was you who came to me in a dream, daughter of Ivor. It was you who put your beauty upon me. Sure, it is that beauty that is my death, and I hungering and thirsting for it."

Having cried thus, Rory stood, listening, like a crow on a furrow when it sees the wind coming.

The tinker, trembling, crept a little nearer. There was nothing, no one.

Suddenly Rory began singing in a loud, chanting, monotonous voice—

"An diugh La' Bride
Thig nighean Imhir as a chnoc,
Cha bhean mise do nighean Imhir,
'S cha bhean Imhir dhomh."

(To-day the day of Bride,
The daughter of Ivor shall come from the knoll;
I will not touch the daughter of Ivor,
Nor shall the daughter of Ivor touch me.)

Then, bowing low, with fantastic gestures, and with the sweep of his plaid making a shadow like a flying cloud, he sang again—

"La' Bride nam brig ban
Thig an rigen ran a tom
Cha bhoin mise ris an rigen ran,
'S cha bhoin an rigen ran ruim."

(On the day of Bride of the fair locks,
The noble queen will come from the hill;
I will not molest the noble queen,
Nor will the noble queen molest me.)

"An' I, too, Nighean Imhir," he cried in a voice more loud, more shrill, more plaintive yet, "will be doing now what our own great forebear did, when he made *tabhartas agus tuis* to you, so that neither he nor his seed for ever should die of you; an' I too, Ruaridh

MacDhonuill mhic Alpein, will make offering and incense." And with that Rory stepped back, and lifted the pipes, and flung them at the base of the Yellow Moonrock, where they caught on a jagged spar and burst with a great wailing screech that made the hair rise on the head of Peter the Tinker, where he crouched sick with the white fear.

"That for my *tabhartas,*" Rory cried again, as though he were calling to a multitude; "an' as I've no *tuis,* an' the only incense I have is the smoke out of my pipe, take the pipe an' the tobacco too, an' it's all the smoke I have or am ever like to have now, an' as good incense too as any other, daughter of Ivor."

Suddenly Peter Lamont heard a thin, strange, curling, twisting bit of music, so sweet for all its wildness that cold and hunger went below his heart. It grew louder, and he shook with fear. But when he looked at Rory M'Alpine, and saw him springing to and fro in a dreadful reel, and snapping his fingers and flinging his arms up and down like flails, he could stand no more, but with a screech rose and turned across the heather, and fluttered and fell and fell and fluttered like a wounded snipe.

He lay still once, after a bad fall, for his breath was like a thistledown blown this way and that above his head. It was on a heathery knoll, and he could see the Moonrock yellow-white in the moonshine. The savage

lilt of that jigging wild air still rang in his ears, with never a sweetness in it now, though when he listened it grew fair and lightsome, and put a spell of joy and longing in him. But he could see nothing of Rory.

He stumbled to his knees and stared. There was something on the road.

He heard a noise as of men struggling. But all he saw was Rory M'Alpine swaying and swinging, now up and now down; and then at last the piper was on his back in the road and tossing like a man in a fit, and screeching with a dreadful voice, "Let me go! let me go! Take your lips off my mouth! take your lips off my mouth!"

Then, abruptly, there was no sound, but only a dreadful silence; till he heard a rush of feet, and heard the heather-sprigs break and crack, and something went past him like a flash of light.

With a scream he flung himself down the heather knoll, and ran like a driven hare till he came to the white road beyond the moor; and just as dawn was breaking, he fell in a heap at the byre-edge at Dalmonadh Toll, and there Duncan Grant found him an hour later, white and senseless still.

Neither Duncan Grant nor anyone else believed Peter Lamont's tale, but at noon the tinker led a reluctant few to the Yellow Moonrock.

The broken pipes still hung on the jagged spar at

the base. Half on the path and half on the heather was the body of Rory M'Alpine. He was all but naked to the waist, and his plaid and jacket were as torn and ragged as Lamont's own, and the bits were scattered far and wide. His lips were blue and swelled. In the hollow of his hairy, twisted throat was a single drop of black blood.

"It's an adder's bite," said Duncan Grant.

None spoke.

THE JUDGMENT O' GOD.

The wind that blows on the feet of the dead came calling loud across the Ross as we put about the boat off the Rudhe Callachain, in the Sound of Jona. The ebb sucked at the keel, while, like a cork, we were swung lightly by the swell. For we were in the strait between Eilean Dubh and the Isle of the Swine; and that is where the current has a bad pull—the current that is made of the inflow and the outflow. I have heard that a weary woman of the olden days broods down there in a cave, and that day and night she weaves a web of water, which a fierce spirit in the sea tears this way and that as soon as woven.

So we put about, and went before the east wind: and below the dip of the sail a-lee I watched Soa grow

bigger and gaunter and blacker against the white wave. As we came so near that it was as though the wash of the sea among the hollows bubbled in our ears, I saw a large bull-seal lying half-in half-out of the water, and staring at us with an angry, fearless look.

Phadric and Ivor caught sight of it almost at the same moment.

To my surprise Phadric suddenly rose and put a spell upon it. I could hear the wind through his clothes as he stood by the mast.

The rosad or spell was, of course, in the Gaelic; but its meaning was something like this—

Ho, ro, O Ron dubh, O Ron dubh!
An ainm an Athar, O Ron!
'S an mhic, O Ron!
'S an Spioraid Naoimh.
O Ron-à-mhàra, O Ron dubh!

Ho, ro, Oh black Seal, Oh black Seal!
In the name of the Father,
And of the Son,
And of the Holy Ghost,
Oh Seal of the deep sea, Oh black Seal!

Hearken the thing that I say to thee,
I, Phadric MacAlastair MhicCrae,
Who dwell in a house on the Island
That you look on night and day from Soa!
For I put *rosad* upon thee,
And upon the woman-seal that won thee,
And the women-seal that are thine,

And the young that thou hast;
Aye, upon thee and all thy kin
I put *rosad*, O Ron dubh, O Ron-à-mhàra!

And may no harm come to me or mine,
Or to any fishing or snaring that is of me;
Or to any sailing by storm or dusk,
Or when the moonshine fills the blind eyes of the dead,
No harm to me or mine
From thee or thine!

With a slow swinging motion of his head Phadric broke out again into the first words of the incantation, and now Ivor joined him; and with the call of the wind and the leaping and the splashing of the waves was blent the chant of the two fishermen—

Ho, ro, O Ron dubh, O Ron dubh!
An ainm an Athar, 's an Mhic, 's an Spioriad Naoimh,
O Ron-à-mhàra, O Ron dubh!

Then the men sat back, with that dazed look in the eyes I have so often seen in those of men or women of the Isles. No word was spoken till we came almost straight upon Eilean-na-h' Aon-Chaorach. Then at the rocks we tacked, and went splashing up the Sound like a pollack on a Sabbath noon.*

* The Iona fishermen, and, indeed, the Gaelic and Scottish fishermen generally, believe that the pollack (porpoise) knows when it is the Sabbath, and on that day will come closer to the land, and be more wanton in its gambols on the sun-warmed surface of the sea, than on the days when the herring-boats are abroad.

"What was wrong with the old man of the sea?" I asked Phadric Macrae.

At first he would say nothing. He looked vaguely at a coiled rope; then, with hand-shaded gaze, across to the red rocks at Fionnaphort. I repeated my question. He took refuge in English.

"It wass ferry likely the *Clansman* would be pringing ta new minister-body. Did you pe knowing him, or his people, or where he came from?"

But I was not to be put off thus; and at last, while Ivor stared down the green-shelving lawns of the sea below us, Phadric told me this thing. His reluctance was partly due to the shyness which, with the Gael, almost invariably follows strong emotion, and partly to that strange, obscure, secretive instinct which is also so characteristically Celtic, and often even prevents Gaels of far apart isles, or of different clans, from communicating to each other stories or legends of a peculiarly intimate kind.

"I will tell you what my father told me, and what, if you like, you may hear again from the sister of my father, who is the wife of Ian Finlay, who has the farm on the north side of Dûn-I.

"You will have heard of old Robert Achanna of Eilanmore, off the Ord o' Sutherland? To be sure, for have you not stayed there. Well, I need not tell you how he came there out of the south, but it will be

news to you to learn that my elder brother Murdoch was had by him as a shepherd, and to help on the farm. And the way of that thing was this. Murdoch had gone to the fishing north of Skye, with Angus and William Macdonald, and in the great gale that broke up their boat, among so many others, he found himself stranded on Eilanmore. Achanna told him that, as he was ruined, and so far from home, he would give him employment; and though Murdoch had never thought to serve under a Galloway man, he agreed.

"For a year he worked on the upper farm, Ardoch-beag as it was called. There the gloom came upon him. Turn which way he would, the beauty that is in the day was no more. In vain, when he came out into the air in the morning did he cry *Deasiul!* and keep by the sun-way. At night he heard the sea calling in his sleep. So, when the lambing was over, he told Achanna that he must go, for he hungered for the sea. True, the wave ran all around Eilanmore, but the farm was between bare hills and among high moors, and the house was in a hollow place. But it was needful for him to go. Even then, though he did not know it, the secrecy of the sea was upon him.

"But the Galloway man did not wish to lose my brother, who was a quiet man, and worked for a small wage. Murdoch was a silent lad, but he had often the light in his eyes, and none knew of what he was think-

ing: maybe it was of a lass, or a friend, or of the ingle-neuk where his old mother sang o' nights, or of the sight and sound of Iona that was his own land; but I'm considerin' it was the sea he was dreamin' of, how the waves ran laughin' an' dancin' against the tide, like lambkins comin' to meet the shepherd, or how the big green billows went sweepin' white an' ghostly through the moonless nights.

"So the troth that was come to between them was this: that Murdoch should abide for a year longer, that is till Lammastide; then that he should no longer live at Ardoch-beag, but, instead, should go and keep the sheep on Bac-Mòr."

"On Bac-Mòr, Phadric," I interrupted, "for sure, you do not mean *our* Bac-Mòr?"

"For sure, I mean no other: Bac-Mòr, of the Treshnish Isles, that is eleven miles north of Iona, and a long four north-west of Staffa: an' just Bac-Mòr, an' no other."

"Murdoch would be near home, there."

"Aye, near, an' farther away: for 'tis to be farther off to be near that which your heart loves but ye can't get."

"Well, Murdoch agreed to this, but he did not know there was no boat on the island. It was all very well in the summer. The herrin'-smacks lay off Bac-Mòr or

Bac-beag many a time; and he could see them mornin', noon, an' night; an' nigh every day he could watch the big steamer comin' southward down the Mornish and Treshnish coasts of Mull, and stand by for an hour off Staffa, or else come northward out of the Sound of Iona round the Eilean Rabach; and once or twice a week he saw the *Clansman* coming or going from Bunessan in the Ross to Scarnish in the Isle of Tiree. Maybe, too, now and again, a foreign sloop or a coasting schooner would sail by; and twice, at least, a yacht lay off the wild shore, and put a boat in at the landing-place, and let some laughing folk loose upon that quiet place. The first time it was a steam yacht, owned by a rich foreigner, either an Englishman or an American,—I misremember now,—an' he spoke to Murdoch as though he were a savage, and he and his gay folk laughed when my brother spoke in the only English he had (an' sober, good English it was), an' then he shoves some money into his hand, as though both were evil-doers and were ashamed to be seen doing what they did.

"'An' what is this for?' said my brother.

"'Oh, it's for yourself, my man, to drink our health with,' answered the English lord, or whatever he was, rudely. Then Murdoch looked at him and his quietly, an' he said, 'God has your health an' my health in the hollow of His hands. But I wish you well. Only, I am not being your man, any more than I am for

calling *you, my* man; an' I will ask you to take back this money to drink with; nor have I any need for money, but only for that which is free to all, but that only God can give.' And with that the foreign people went away, and laughed less. But when the second yacht came, though it was a yawl owned by a Glasgow man who had folk in the west, Murdoch would not come down to the shore, but lay under the shadow of a rock amid his sheep, and kept his eyes upon the sun that was moving west out of the south.

"Well, all through the fine months Murdoch stayed on Bac-Mòr, and thereafter through the early winter. The last time I saw him was at the New Year. On Hogmanay night my father was drinking hard, and nothing would serve him but he must borrow Alec Macarthur's boat, and that he and our mother and myself, and Ian Finlay and his wife, my sister, should go out before the quiet south wind that was blowing, and see Murdoch where he lay sleeping or sat dreaming in his lonely bothy. And, truth, we went. It was a white sailing that, I remember. The moonshinings ran in and out of the wavelets like herrings through salmon-nets. The fire-flauchts, too, went speeding about. I was but a laddie then, an' I noted it all; an' the sheet-lightning that played behind the cloudy lift in the nor'-west.

"But when we got to Bac-Mòr there was no sign of Murdoch at the bothy: no, not though we called high

and low. Then my father and Ian Finlay went to look, and we stayed by the peat-fire. When they came back, an hour later, I saw that my father was no more in drink. He had the same look in his eyes as Ronald McLean had that day last winter when they told him his bit girlie had been caught by the small-pox in Glasgow.

"I could not hear, or I could not make out, what was said; but I know that we all got into the boat again, all except my father. And he stayed. And next day Ian Finlay and Alec Macarthur went out to Bac-Mòr, and brought him back.

"And from him and from Ian I knew all there was to be known. It was a hard New Year for all, and since that day, till a night of which I will tell you, my father brooded and drank, drank and brooded, and my mother wept through the winter gloamings and spent the nights starin' into the peats, wi' her knittin' lyin' on her lap.

"For when they had gone to seek Murdoch that Hogmanay night, they came upon him away from his sheep. But this was what they saw. There was a black rock that stood out in the moonshine, with the water all about it; and on this rock Murdoch lay naked, and laughing wild. An' every now and then he would lean forward and stretch his arms out, an' call to his dearie. An' at last, just as the watchers, shiverin' wi' fear an' awe, were going to close in upon him, they saw a—a—thing—come out o' the water. It was long an' dark,

an' Ian said its eyes were like clots o' blood; but as to that no man can say yea or nay, for Ian himself admits it was a seal.

"An' this thing is true, *an ainm an Athar!* they saw the dark beast o' the sea creep onto the rock beside Murdoch, an' lie down beside him, and let him clasp an' kiss it. An' then he stood up, and laughed till the skin crept on those who heard, and cried out on his dearie and on a' the dumb things o' the sea, and on the Wave-Haunter an' the Grey Shadow; an' he raised his hands, an' cursed the world o' men, and cried out to God, *"Turn your face to your own airidh, Oh God, an' may rain an' storm an' snow be between us!"*

"An' wi' that, Deirg, his collie, could bide no more, but loupit across the water, and was on the rock beside him, wi' his fell bristling like a hedge-rat. For both the naked man an' the wet, gleamin' beast, a great she-seal out o' the north, turned upon Deirg, an' he fought for his life. But what could the puir thing do? The seal buried her fangs in his shoulder at last, an' pinned him to the ground. Then Murdoch stooped, an' dragged her off, an' bent down an' tore at the throat o' Deirg wi' his own teeth. Aye, God's truth it is! An' when the collie was stark, he took him up by the hind legs an' the tail, an' swung him round an' round his head, an' whirled him into the sea, where he fell black in a white splatch o' the moon.

"An' wi' that, Murdoch slipped, and reeled backward into the sea, his hands gripping at the whirling stars. An' the thing beside him louped after him, an' my father an' Ian heard a cry an' a cryin' that made their hearts sob. But when they got down to the rock they saw nothing, except the floating body o' Deirg.

"Sure it was a weary night for the old man, there on Bac-Mòr by himself, with that awful thing that had happened. He stayed there to see and hear what might be seen and heard. But nothing he heard—nothing saw. It was afterwards that he heard how Donncha MacDonald had been on Bac-Mòr three days before this, and how Murdoch had told him he was in love wi' a *maighdeannmhara,* a sea-maid.

"But this thing has to be known. It was a month later, on the night o' the full moon, that Ian Finlay and Ian Macarthur and Sheumais Macallum were upset in the calm water inside the Sound, just off Port-na-Frang, and were nigh drowned, but that they called upon God and the Son, and so escaped, and heard no more the laughter of Murdoch from the sea.

"And at midnight my father heard the voice of his eldest son at the door; but he would not let him in. But in the morning he found his boat broken and shred in splinters, and his one net all torn. An' that day was the Sabbath; so, being a holy day, he took the Scripture with him, an' he and Neil Morrison the minister,

having had the Bread an' Wine, went along the Sound in a boat, following a shadow in the water, till they came to Soa. An' there Neil Morrison read the Word o' God to the seals that lay baskin' in the sun; and one, a female, snarled and showed her fangs; and another, a black one, lifted its head and made a noise that was not like the barking of any seal, but was as the laughter of Murdoch when he swung the dead body of Deirg.

"And that is all that is to be said. And silence is best now between you and any other. And no man knows the judgments o' God.

"And that is all."

THE DARK NAMELESS ONE.

One day this summer I sailed with Phadric Macrae and Ivor McLean, boatmen of Iona, along the south-western reach of the Ross of Mull.

The whole coast of the Ross is indescribably wild and desolate. From Feenafort (Fhionnphort), opposite Balliemore of Icolmkill, to the hamlet of Earraid Light-house, it were hardly exaggeration to say that the whole tract is uninhabited by man and unenlivened by any green thing. It is the haunt of the cormorant and the seal.

No one who has not visited this region can realise its barrenness. Its one beauty is the faint bloom which lies upon it in the sunlight—a bloom which becomes as the glow of an inner flame when the sun westers without cloud or mist. This is from the ruddy hue of the granite, of which all that wilderness is wrought.

It is a land tortured by the sea, scourged by the sea-wind. A myriad lochs, fiords, inlets, passages, serrate its broken frontiers. Innumerable islets and reefs, fanged like ravenous wolves, sentinel every shallow, lurk in every strait. He must be a skilled boatman who would take the Sound of Earraid and penetrate the reaches of the Ross.

There are many days in the months of peace, as the islanders call the period from Easter till the autumnal equinox, when Earraid and the rest of Ross seem under a spell. It is the spell of beauty. Then the yellow light of the sun is upon the tumbled masses and precipitous shelves and ledges, ruddy petals or leaves of that vast Flower of Granite. Across it the cloud shadows trail their purple phantoms, their scythe-sweep curves, and abrupt evanishing floodings of warm dusk. From wet boulder to boulder, from crag to shelly crag, from fissure to fissure, the sea ceaselessly weaves a girdle of foam. When the wide luminous stretch of waters beyond—green near the land, and farther out all of a living blue, interspersed with wide alleys of amethyst—is

white with the sea-horses, there is such a laughter of surge and splash all the way from Slugan-dubh to the Rudha-nam-Maol-Mòra, or to the tide-swept promontory of the Sgeireig-a'-Bhochdaidh, that, looking inland, one sees through a rainbow-shimmering veil of ever-flying spray.

But the sun spell is even more fugitive upon the face of this wild land than the spell of beauty upon a woman. So runs one of our proverbs: as the falling of the wave, as the fading of the leaf, so is the beauty of a woman, unless—ah, that *unless,* and the indiscoverable fount of joy that can only be come upon by hazard once in life, and thereafter only in dreams, and the Land of the Rainbow that is never reached, and the green sea-doors of Tir-na-thonn, that open now no more to any wandering wave!

It was from Phadric, on that day, I heard the strange tale of his kinsman Murdoch, the tale of "The Judgments' God" that I have told elsewhere. It was Phadruic, too, who told me of the Sea-witch of Earraid.

"Yes," he said, "I have heard of the *each-uisge* (the sea-beast, sea-kelpie, or water-horse), but I have never seen it with the eyes. My father and my brother knew of it. But this thing I know, and this what we call *an-cailleach-uisge* (the siren or water-witch); the *cailliach,* mind you, not the *maighdeann-mhàra* (the

mermaid), who means no harm. May she hear my saying it! The cailliach is old and clad in weeds, but her voice is young, and she always sits so that the light is in the eyes of the beholder. She seems to him young also, and fair. She has two familiars in the form of seals, one black as the grave, and the other white as the shroud that is in the grave; and these sometimes upset a boat, if the sailor laughs at the water-witch's song.

"A man netted one of those seals, more than a hundred years ago, with his herring-trawl, and dragged it into the boat; but the other seal tore at the net so savagely, with its head and paws over the bows, that it was clear no net would long avail. The man heard them crying and screaming, and then talking low and muttering, like women in a frenzy. In his fear he cast the nets adrift, all but a small portion that was caught in the thwarts. Afterwards, in the portion, he found a tress of woman's hair. And that is just so: to the Stones be it said.

"The grandson of this man, Tòmais McNair, is still living, a shepherd on Eilean-Uamhain, beyond Lunga in the Cairnburg Isles. A few years ago, off Callachan Point, he saw the two seals, and heard, though he did not see, the cailliach. And that which I tell you—Christ's Cross before me—is a true thing."

All the time that Phadric was speaking, I saw that

Ivor McLean looked away: either as though he heard nothing, or did not wish to hear. There was dream in his eyes; I saw that, so said nothing for a time.

"What is it, Ivor?" I asked at last, in a low voice. He started, and looked at me strangely.

"What will you be asking that for? What are you doing in my mind, that is secret?"

"I see that you are brooding over something. Will you not tell me?"

"Tell her," said Phadric quietly.

But Ivor kept silent. There was a look in his eyes which I understood. Thereafter we sailed on, with no word in the boat at all.

That night, a dark, rainy night it was, with an uplift wind beating high over against the hidden moon, I went to the cottage where Ivor McLean lived with his old deaf mother, deaf nigh upon twenty years, ever since the night of the nights when she heard the women whisper that Callum, her husband, was among the drowned, after a death-wind had blown.

When I entered, he was sitting before the flaming coal-fire; for on Iona now, by decree of MacCailin Mòr there is no more peat burned.

"You will tell me now, Ivor?" was all I said.

"Yes; I will be telling you now. And the reason why I did not tell you before was because it is not a wise or a good thing to tell ancient stories about the

sea while still on the running wave. Macrae should not have done that thing. It may be we shall suffer for it when next we go out with the nets. We were to go to-night; but no, not I, no no, for sure, not for all the herring in the Sound."

"Is it an ancient *sgeul,* Ivor?"

"Aye. I am not for knowing the age of these things. It may be as old as the days of the Féinn for all I know. It has come down to us. Alasdair Mac-Alasdair of Tiree, him that used to boast of having all the stories of Colum and Brighde, it was he told it to the mother of my mother, and she to me."

"What is it called?"

"Well, this and that; but there is no harm in saying it is called the Dark Nameless One."

"The Dark Nameless One!"

"It is this way. But will you ever have been hearing of the MacOdrums of Uist?"

"Aye: the Sliochd-nan-ròn."

"That is so. God knows. The Sliochd-nan-ròn . . . the progeny of the Seal. . . . Well, well, no man knows what moves in the shadow of life. And now I will be telling you that old ancient tale, as it was given to me by the mother of my mother.

On a day of the days, St. Colum was walking alone by the sea-shore. The monks were at the hoe or the spade,

and some milking the kye, and some at the fishing. They say it was on the first day of the *Faoilleach Geamhraidh,* the day that is called *Am fheill Brighde.*

The holy man had wandered on to where the rocks are, opposite to Soa. He was praying and praying, and it is said that whenever he prayed aloud, the barren egg in the nest would quicken, and the blighted bud unfold, and the butterfly cleave its shroud.

Of a sudden he came upon a great black seal, lying silent on the rocks, with wicked eyes.

"My blessing upon you, O Ròn," he said with the good kind courteousness that was his.

"*Droch spadadh ort,*" answered the seal, "A bad end to you, Colum of the Gown."

"Sure, now," said Colum angrily, "I am knowing by that curse that you are no friend of Christ, but of the evil pagan faith out of the north. For here I am known ever as Colum the White, or as Colum the Saint; and it is only the Picts and the wanton Normen who deride me because of the holy white robe I wear."

"Well, well," replied the seal, speaking the good Gaelic as though it were the tongue of the deep sea, as God knows it may be for all you, I, or the blind wind can say; "Well, well, let that thing be: it's a wave-way here or a wave-way there. But now if it is a Druid you are, whether of Fire or of Christ, be telling me where my woman is, and where my little daughter."

At this, Colum looked at him for a long while. Then he knew.

"It is a man you were once, O Ròn?"

"Maybe aye and maybe no."

"And with that thick Gaelic that you have, it will be out of the north isles you come?"

"That is a true thing."

"Now I am for knowing at last who and what you are. You are one of the race of Odrum the Pagan."

"Well, I am not denying it, Colum. And what is more, I am Angus MacOdrum, Aonghas mac Torcall mhic Odrum, and the name I am known by is Black Angus."

"A fitting name too," said Colum the Holy, "because of the black sin in your heart, and the black end God has in store for you."

At that Black Angus laughed.

"Why is there laughter upon you, Man-Seal?"

"Well, it is because of the good company I'll be having. But, now, give me the word: Are you for having seen or heard aught of a woman called Kirsteen McVurich?"

"Kirsteen—Kirsteen—that is the good name of a nun it is, and no sea wanton!"

"Oh, a name here or a name there is soft sand. And so you cannot be for telling me where my woman is?"

"No."

"Then a stake for your belly, and the nails through your hands, thirst on your tongue, and the corbies at your eyne!"

And, with that, Black Angus louped into the green water, and the hoarse wild laugh of him sprang into the air and fell dead against the cliff like a wind-spent mew.

Colum went slowly back to the brethren, brooding deep. "God is good," he said in a low voice, again and again; and each time that he spoke there came a fair sweet daisy into the grass, or a yellow bird rose up, with song to it for the first time wonderful and sweet to hear.

As he drew near to the House of God he met Murtagh, an old monk of the ancient old race of the isles.

"Who is Kirsteen McVurich, Murtagh?" he asked.

"She was a good servant of Christ, she was, in the south isles, Oh Colum, till Black Angus won her to the sea."

"And when was that?"

"Nigh upon a thousand years ago."

At that Colum stared in amaze. But Murtagh was a man of truth, nor did he speak in allegories. "Aye, Colum, my father, nigh upon a thousand years ago."

"But can mortal sin live as long as that?"

"Aye, it endureth. Long, long ago, before Oisìn

sang, before Fionn, before Cuchullin was a glorious great prince, and in the days when the Tuatha-De Danànn were sole lords in all green Banba, Black Angus made the woman Kirsteen McVurich leave the place of prayer and go down to the sea-shore, and there he leaped upon her and made her his prey, and she followed him into the sea."

"And is death above her now?"

"No. She is the woman that weaves the sea-spells at the wild place out yonder that is known as Earraid: she that is called *an-Cailleach-uisge,* the sea-witch."

"Then why was Black Angus for the seeking her here and the seeking her there?"

"It is the Doom. It is Adam's first wife she is, that sea-witch over there, where the foam is ever in the sharp fangs of the rocks."

"And who will he be?"

"His body is the body of Angus the son of Torcall of the race of Odrum, for all that a seal he is to the seeming; but the soul of him is Judas."

"Black Judas, Murtagh?"

"Aye, Black Judas, Colum."

But with that, Ivor McLean rose abruptly from before the fire, saying that he would speak no more that night. And truly enough there was a wild, lone, desolate cry in the wind, and a slapping of the waves one

upon the other with an eerie laughing sound, and the screaming of a sea-mew that was like a human thing.

So I touched the shawl of his mother, who looked up with startled eyes and said, "God be with us;" and then I opened the door, and the salt smell of the wrack was in my nostrils, and the great drowning blackness of the night.

II.

THE FISHER OF MEN.

"But now I have grown nothing, being all,
And the whole world weighs down upon my heart."
(FERGUS AND THE DRUID.)

WHEN old Sheen nic Lèoid came back to the croft, after she had been to the burn at the edge of the green airidh, where she had washed the *claar* that was for the potatoes at the peeling, she sat down before the peats.

She was white with years. The mountain wind was chill, too, for all that the sun had shone throughout the midsummer day. It was well to sit before the peat-fire.

The croft was on the slope of a mountain and had the south upon it. North, south, east, and west, other great slopes reached upward like hollow green waves frozen into silence by the very wind that curved them so, and freaked their crests into peaks and jagged pinnacles. Stillness was in that place for ever and ever. What though the Gorromalt Water foamed down Ben Nair, where the croft was, and made a hoarse voice for aye surrendering sound to silence? What though at times the stones fell from the ridges of Ben Chaisteal

and Maolmòr, and clattered down the barren declivities till they were slung in the tangled meshes of whin and juniper? What though on stormy dawns the eagle screamed as he fought against the wind that graved a thin line upon the aged front of Ben Mulad, where his eyrie was: or that the kestrel cried above the rabbit-burrows in the strath: or that the hill-fox barked, or that the curlew wailed, or that the scattered sheep made an endless mournful crying? What were these but the ministers of silence?

There was no blue smoke in the strath except from the one turf cot. In the hidden valley beyond Ben Nair there was a hamlet, and nigh upon three-score folk lived there; but that was over three miles away. Sheen Macleod was alone in that solitary place, save for her son Alasdair Mòr Òg. "Young Alasdair" he was still, though the grey feet of fifty years had marked his hair. Alasdair Òg he was while Alasdair Ruadh mac Chalum mhic Lèoid, that was his father, lived. But when Alasdair Ruadh changed, and Sheen was left a mourning woman, he that was their son was Alasdair Òg still.

She had sore weariness that day. For all that, it was not the weight of the burden that made her go in and out of the afternoon sun, and sit by the red glow of the peats, brooding deep.

When, nigh upon an hour later, Alasdair came up the slope, and led the kye to the byre, she did not hear

him: nor had she sight of him, when his shadow flickered in before him and lay along the floor.

"Poor old woman," he said to himself, bending his head because of the big height that was his, and he there so heavy and strong, and tender, too, for all the tangled black beard and the wild hill-eyes that looked out under bristling grey-black eyebrows.

"Poor old woman, and she with the tired heart that she has. Aye, aye, for sure the weeks lap up her shadow, as the sayin' is. She will be thinking of him that is gone. Aye, or maybe the old thoughts of her are goin' back on their own steps, down this glen an' over that hill an' away beyont that strath, an' this corrie an' that moor. Well, well, it is a good love, that of the mother. Sure a bitter pain it will be to me when there's no old grey hair there to stroke. It's quiet here, terrible quiet, God knows, to Himself be the blessin' for this an' for that; but when she has the white sleep at last, then it'll be a sore day for me, an' one that I will not be able to bear to hear the sheep callin', callin', callin' through the rain on the hills here, and Gorromalt Water an' no other voice to be with me on that day of the days."

She heard a faint sigh, and stirred a moment, but did not look round.

"Muim'-à-ghraidh, is it tired you are, an' this so fine a time, too?"

With a quick gesture, the old woman glanced at him.

"Ah, child, is that you indeed? Well, I am glad of that, for I have the trouble again."

"What trouble, Muim' ghaolaiche?"

But the old woman did not answer. Wearily she turned her face to the peat-glow again.

Alasdair seated himself on the big wooden chair to her right. For a time he stayed silent thus, staring into the red heart of the peats. What was the gloom upon the old heart that he loved? What trouble was it?

At last he rose and put meal and water into the iron pot, and stirred the porridge while it seethed and sputtered. Then he poured boiling water upon the tea in the brown jenny, and put the new bread and the sweet-milk scones on the rude deal board that was the table.

"Come, dear tired old heart," he said, "and let us give thanks to the Being."

"Blessings and thanks," she said, and turned round.

Alasdair poured out the porridge, and watched the steam rise. Then he sat down, with a knife in one hand and the brown-white loaf in the other.

"Oh God," he said, in the low voice he had in the kirk when the Bread and Wine were given—"Oh God, be giving us now thy blessing, and have the thanks. And give us peace."

Peace there was in the sorrowful old eyes of the mother. The two ate in silence. The big clock that

was by the bed *tick-tacked, tick-tacked.* A faint sputtering came out of a peat that had bog-gas in it. Shadows moved in the silence, and met and whispered and moved into deep, warm darkness. There was peace.

There was still a red flush above the hills in the west when the mother and son sat in the ingle again.

"What is it, mother-my-heart?" Alasdair asked at last, putting his great red hand upon the woman's knee.

She looked at him for a moment. When she spoke she turned away her gaze again.

"Foxes have holes, and the fowls of the air have their places of rest, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head."

"And what then, dear? Sure, it is the deep meaning you have in that grey old head that I'm loving so."

"Aye, lennav-aghray, there is meaning to my words. It is old I am, and the hour of my hours is near. I heard a voice outside the window last night. It is a voice I will not be hearing, no, not for seventy years. It was cradle-sweet, it was."

She paused, and there was silence for a time.

"Well, dear," she began again, wearily, and in a low, weak voice, "it is more tired and more tired I am every day now this last month. Two Sabbaths ago I woke, and there were bells in the air: and you are for knowing well, Alasdair, that no kirk-bells ever rang in Strath-Nair. At edge o' dark on Friday, and by the same

token the thirteenth day it was, I fell asleep, and dreamed the mools were on my breast, and that the roots of the white daisies were in the hollows where the eyes were that loved you, Alasdair, my son."

The man looked at her with troubled gaze. No words would come. Of what avail to speak when there is nothing to be said? God sends the gloom upon the cloud, and there is rain: God sends the gloom upon the hill, and there is mist: God sends the gloom upon the sun, and there is winter. It is God, too, sends the gloom upon the soul, and there is change. The swallow knows when to lift up her wing over against the shadow that creeps out of the north: the wild swan knows when the smell of snow is behind the sun: the salmon, lone in the brown pool among the hills, hears the deep sea, and his tongue pants for salt, and his fins quiver, and he knows that his time is come, and that the sea calls. The doe knows when the fawn hath not yet quaked in her belly: is not the violet more deep in the shadowy dewy eyes? The woman knows when the babe hath not yet stirred a little hand: is not the wild-rose on her cheek more often seen, and are not the shy tears moist on quiet hands in the dusk? How, then, shall the soul not know when the change is nigh at last? Is it a less thing than a reed, which sees the yellow birch-gold adrift on the lake, and the gown of the heather grow russet when the purple has passed into the sky, and the white

bog-down wave grey and tattered where the loneroid grows dark and pungent—which sees, and knows that the breath of the Death-Weaver at the Pole is fast faring along the frozen norland peaks. It is more than a reed, it is more than a wild doe on the hills, it is more than a swallow lifting her wing against the coming of the shadow, it is more than a swan drunken with the savour of the blue wine of the waves when the green Arctic lawns are white and still. It is more than these, which has the Son of God for brother, and is clothed with light. God doth not extinguish at the dark tomb what he hath litten in the dark womb.

Who shall say that the soul knows not when the bird is aweary of the nest, and the nest is aweary of the wind? Who shall say that all portents are vain imaginings? A whirling straw upon the road is but a whirling straw: yet the wind is upon the cheek almost ere it is gone.

It was not for Alasdair Òg, then, to put a word upon the saying of the woman that was his mother, and was age-white, and could see with the seeing of old wise eyes.

So all that was upon his lips was a sigh, and the poor prayer that is only a breath out of the heart.

"You will be telling me, grey sweetheart," he said lovingly, at last—"you will be telling me what was behind the word that you said: that about the foxes that

have holes for the hiding, poor beasts, and the birdeens wi' their nests, though the Son o' Man hath not where to lay his head?"

"Aye, Alasdair, my son that I bore long syne an' that I'm leaving soon, I will be for telling you that thing, an' now too, for I am knowing what is in the dark this night o' the nights."

Old Sheen put her head back wearily on the chair, and let her hands lie, long and white, palm-downward upon her knees. The peat-glow warmed the dull grey that lurked under her closed eyes and about her mouth, and in the furrowed cheeks. Alasdair moved nearer and took her right hand in his, where it lay like a tired sheep between two scarped rocks. Gently he smoothed her hand, and wondered why so frail and slight a creature as this small old wizened woman could have mothered a great swarthy man like himself—he a man now, with his two score and ten years, and yet but a boy there at the dear side of her.

"It was this way, Alasdair-mochree," she went on in her low thin voice—like a wind-worn leaf, the man that was her son thought. "It was this way. I went down to the burn to wash the *claar,* and when I was there I saw a wounded fawn in the bracken. The big sad eyes of it were like those of Maisie, poor lass, when she had the birthing that was her going-call. I went through

the bracken, and down by the Gorromalt, and into the Glen of the Willows.

"And when I was there, and standing by the running water, I saw a man by the stream-side. He was tall, but spare and weary: and the clothes upon him were poor and worn. He had sorrow. When he lifted his head at me, I saw the tears. Dark, wonderful, sweet eyes they were. His face was pale. It was not the face of a man of the hills. There was no red in it, and the eyes looked in upon themselves. He was a fair man, with the white hands that a woman has, a woman like the Bantighearna of Glenchaisteal over yonder. His voice, too, was a voice like that: in the softness, and the sweet, quiet sorrow, I am meaning.

"The word that I gave him was in the English: for I thought he was like a man out of *Sasunn,* or of the southlands somewhere. But he answered me in the Gaelic: sweet, good Gaelic like that of the Bioball over there, to Himself be the praise.

"'And is it the way down the Strath you are seeking,' I asked: 'and will you not be coming up to the house yonder, poor cot though it is, and have a sup of milk, and a rest if it's weary you are?'

"'You are having my thanks for that,' he said, 'and it is as though I had both the good rest and the cool sweet drink. But I am following the flowing water here.'

"'Is it for the fishing?' I asked.

"'I am a Fisher,' he said, and the voice of him was low and sad.

"He had no hat on his head, and the light that streamed through a rowan-tree was in his long hair. He had the pity of the poor in his sorrowful grey eyes.

"'And will you not sleep with us?' I asked again: 'that is, if you have no place to go to, and are a stranger in this country, as I am thinking you are; for I have never had sight of you in the home-straths before.'

"'I am a stranger,' he said, 'and I have no home, and my father's house is a great way off.'

"'Do not tell me, poor man,' I said gently, for fear of the pain, 'do not tell me if you would fain not; but it is glad I will be if you will give me the name you have.'

"'My name is Mac-an-t'-Saoir,' he answered with the quiet deep gaze that was his. And with that he bowed his head, and went on his way, brooding deep.

"Well, it was with a heavy heart I turned, and went back through the bracken. A heavy heart, for sure, and yet, oh peace too, cool dews of peace. And the fawn was there: healed, Alasdair, healed, and whinny-bleating for its doe, that stood on a rock wi' lifted hoof an' stared down the glen to where the Fisher was.

"When I was at the burnside, a woman came down the brae. She was fair to see, but the tears were upon her.

"'Oh,' she cried, 'have you seen a man going this way?'

"'Aye, for sure,' I answered, 'but what man would he be?'

"'He is called Mac-an-t'-Saoir.'

"'Well, there are many men that are called Son of the Carpenter. What will his own name be?'

"'Iosa,' she said.

"And when I looked at her, she was weaving the wavy branches of a thorn near by, and sobbing low, and it was like a wreath or crown that she made.

"'And who will you be, poor woman?' I asked.

"'Oh my Son, my Son,' she said, and put her apron over her head and went down into the Glen of the Willows, she weeping sore, too, at that, poor woman.

"So now, Alasdair, my son, tell me what thought you have about this thing that I have told you. For I know well whom I met on the brae there, and who the Fisher was. And when I was at the peats here once more I sat down, and my mind sank into myself. And it is knowing the knowledge I am."

"Well, well, dear, it is sore tired you are. Have rest now. But sure there are many men called Macintyre."

"Aye, an' what Gael that you know will be for giving you his surname like that."

Alasdair had no word for that. He rose to put

some more peats on the fire. When he had done this, he gave a cry.

The whiteness that was on the mother's hair was now in the face. There was no blood there, or in the drawn lips. The light in the old, dim eyes was like water after frost.

He took her hand in his. Clay-cold it was. He let it go, and it fell straight by the chair, stiff as the cromak he carried when he was with the sheep.

"Oh my God and my God," he whispered, white with the awe, and the bitter cruel pain.

Then it was that he heard a knocking at the door.

"Who is there?" he cried hoarsely.

"Open, and let me in." It was a low, sweet voice but was that grey hour the time for a welcome?

"Go, but go in peace, whoever you are. There is death here."

"Open, and let me in."

At that, Alasdair, shaking like a reed in the wind, unclasped the latch. A tall fair man, ill-clad and weary, pale, too, and with dreaming eyes, came in.

"*Beannachd Dhe an Tigh,*" he said, "God's blessing on this house, and on all here."

"The same upon yourself," Alasdair said, with the weary pain in his voice. "And who will you be? and forgive the asking."

"I am called Mac-an-t'-Saoir, and Iosa is the name I bear—Jesus, the Son of the Carpenter."

"It is a good name. And is it good you are seeking this night?"

"I am a Fisher."

"Well, that's here an' that's there. But will you go to the Strath over the hill, and tell the good man that is there, the minister, Lachlan MacLachlan, that old Sheen nic Lèoid, wife of Alasdair Ruadh, is dead."

"I know that, Alasdair Òg."

"And how will you be knowing that, and my name too, you that are called Macintyre?"

"I met the white soul of Sheen as it went down by the Glen of the Willows a brief while ago. She was singing a glad song, she was. She had green youth in her eyes. And a man was holding her by the hand. It was Alasdair Ruadh."

At that Alasdair fell on his knees. When he looked up there was no one there. Through the darkness outside the door, he saw a star shining white, and leaping like a pulse.

It was three days after that day of shadow that Sheen Macleod was put under the green turf.

On each night, Alasdair Òg walked in the Glen of the Willows, and there he saw a man fishing, though ever afar off. Stooping he was, always, and like a shadow at

times. But he was the man that was called Iosa Mac-an-t'-Saoir—Jesus, the Son of the Carpenter.

And on the night of the earthing he saw the Fisher close by.

"Lord God," he said, with the hush on his voice, and deep awe in his wondering eyes: "Lord God!"

And the Man looked at him.

"Night and day, Alasdair MacAlasdair," he said, "night and day I fish in the waters of the world. And these waters are the waters of grief, and the waters of sorrow, and the waters of despair. And it is the souls of the living I fish for. And lo, I say this thing unto you, for you shall not see me again: *Go in peace.* Go in peace, good soul of a poor man, for thou hast seen the Fisher of Men."

III.

SILIS.

THERE were two men who loved one woman. The name of the woman was Silis: the names of the men were Sheumas and Isla. She had beauty as a young girl, but now she was beautiful. To some it was only a troubling light about her. Dark, her beauty was of light and shadow, as twilight is: but as in the dusk one cannot see what is far within it, so none saw into the twilight of this woman's soul.

One night the two men were upon the water. It was a dead calm, and the nets had been laid. There was no moon at all, and only a star or two up in the black corner of the sky. The sea had wandering flames in it: and when the big jellyfish floated by, they were like the tide-lamps that some say the dead bear on their drowned faces.

"Some day I may be telling you a strange thing, Sheumas," said Isla, after the long silence there had been since the last net had sent a cloud of sparkles from the gulfs.

"Aye?" said Sheumas, taking his pipe from his mouth, and looking at the spire of smoke rising just forward o' the mast. It was only the tide feeling its way up the sea-loch, for there was not a breath of wind. Here and there were dusky shadows: the boats of the fishermen of Inchghunnais. Each carried a red light, and in some were green lanterns slung midway up the mast.

No other word was said for a long time.

"And I'm wondering," said Isla at last: "I'm wondering what you'll think of that story."

Sheumas made no answer to that. He smoked, and stared down into the dark water.

After a time he rose, and leaned against the mast. Though there was no light of either moon or lamp, he put his hand above his eyes, as his wont was.

"I'm thinking the mackerel will be coming this way to-night. This is the third time I've heard the snoring of the pollack . . . away yonder, beyond Peter Macallum's boat."

"Well, Sheumas, I'll sleep a bit. I had only the outside of a sleep last night."

With that Isla knocked the ash out of his pipe, and lay over against a pile of rope, and shut his eyes, and did not sleep at all because of the sick dull pain of the homeless man he was—home, home, home, and Silis the name of it.

When, an hour or more later, he grew stiff he moved, and opened his eyes. His mate was sitting at the helm, but the light in his pipe was out, though he held the pipe in his mouth, and his eyes were wide staring open.

"I would not be telling me that story, Isla," he said.

Isla answered nothing, but shifted back to where he was before, for all his cramped leg. He closed his eyes again.

At the full of the tide, in the dark hour before the false dawn, as the first glimmer is called, the glimmer that comes and goes, both men rose, and moved about, stamping their feet. Each lit his pipe, and the smoke hung long in little greyish puffs, so dead-still was it.

On the *Brudhearg,* John Macalpine's boat, young Neil Macalpine sang. The two men on the *Eala* could hear his singing. It was one of the strange Gaelic songs of Ian Mòr.

Oh, she will have the deep dark heart, for all her face is fair,
As deep and dark as though beneath the shadow of her hair:
For in her hair a spirit dwells that no white spirit is,
And hell is in the hopeless heaven of that lost spirit's kiss.

She has two men within the palm, the hollow of her hand:
She takes their souls and blows them forth as idle drifted sand:
And one falls back upon her breast that is his quiet home,
And one goes out into the night and is as wind-blown foam.

Sheumas leaned against the tiller of the *Eala,* and looked at Isla. He saw a shadow on his face. With his right foot the man tapped against a loose spar that was on the starboard deck.

When the singer ceased, Isla stared moveless over across the water to where the *Brudhearg* lay.

There were words on his lips, but they died away when Neil Macalpine broke into a love-song, "Mo nighean donn."

"Can you be telling me, Isla," said Sheumas, "who was the man that made that song about the homeless man?"

"Ian Mòr."

"Ian Mòr of the Hills?"

"Aye."

"They say he had the shadow upon him?"

"Well, what then?"

"Was it because of love?"

"It was because of love."

"Did the woman love him?"

"Aye."

"Did she go to him?"

"No."

"Was that why he had the mind-dark?"

"Aye."

"But he loved her, and she loved him?"

"He loved her, and she loved him."

For a time Sheumas kept silence. Then he spoke again.

"She was the wife of another man?"

"Aye; she was the wife of another man."

"Did *he* love her?"

"Yes, for sure."

"Did *she* love *him?*"

"Yes . . . yes."

"Whom, then, did she love? For a woman can love one man only."

"She loved both."

"That is not a possible thing: not the one deep love. It is a lie, Isla Macleod."

"Yes, it is a lie, Sheumas Maclean."

"Which man did she love?"

Isla slowly shook the ash from his pipe, and looked for a second or two at a momentary quiver in the sky in the north-east.

"The dawn will be here soon now, Sheumas."

"Aye. I was asking you, Isla, which man did she love?"

"Sure she loved the man who gave her the ring."

"Which man did she love?"

"Oh for sure, man, you're asking me just like the lawyer who has the trials away at Balliemore on the mainland yonder."

"Well, I'll tell you that thing myself, Isla Macleod, if you'll tell me the name of the woman."

"I am not for knowing the name."

"Was it Mary . . . or Jessie . . . or mayhap was it Silis, now?"

"I am not for knowing the name."

"Well, well, it might be Silis, then?"

"Aye, for sure it might be Silis. As well Silis as any other."

"And what would the name of the other man be?"

"What man?"

"The man whose ring she wore?"

"I am not remembering that name."

"Well, now, would it be Padruic, or mayhap Ivor, or . . . or . . . perhaps, now, Sheumas?"

"Aye, it might be that."

"Sheumas?"

"Aye, as well that as any other."

"And what was the end?"

"The end o' what?"

"The end of that loving?"

Isla Macleod gave a low laugh. Then he stooped to pick up the pipe he had dropped. Suddenly he rose without touching it. He put his heel on the warm clay, and crushed it.

"That is the end of that kind of loving," he said. He laughed low again as he said that.

Sheumas leaned and picked up the trodden fragments.

"They're warm still, Macleod."

"Are they?" Isla cried at that, his eyes with a red light coming into the blue: "then they will go where the man in the song went, the man who sought his home for ever and ever and never came any nearer than into the shine of the window-lamps."

With that he threw the pieces into the dark water that was already growing ashy-grey.

"'Tis a sure cure, that, Sheumas Maclean."

"Aye, so they say, . . . and so, so: aye, as you were saying, Ian Mòr went into the shadow because of that home he could not win?"

"So they say. And now we'll take the nets. 'Tis a heavy net that comes out black, as the sayin' is. They're heavy for sure, after this still night, an' the wind southerly, an' the pollack this way an' that."

"Well, now, that's strange."

"What is strange, Sheumas Maclean?"

"That you should say that thing."

"And for why that?"

"Oh, just this. Silis had a dream the other night, she had. She dreamed she saw you standing alone on the *Eala;* and you were hauling hard a heavy net, so that the sweat ran down your face. And your face was dead-white pale, she said. An' you hauled an' you

hauled. An' someone beside you that she couldn't see laughed an' laughed: an' . . ."

With a stifled oath, Isla broke in upon the speaker's words:

"Why, man alive, you said he, the man, myself it is, was alone on the *Eala*."

"Well, Silis saw no one but yourself, Isla Macleod."

"But she heard someone beside me laughing an' laughing."

"So she said. And you were dead-white, she said: with the sweat pouring down you. An' you pulled an' you pulled. Then you looked up at her and said: *'It's a heavy net that comes up black, as the sayin' is.'*"

Isla Macleod made no answer to that, but slowly began to haul at the nets. A swift moving light slid hither and thither well away to the north-east. The sea greyed. A new, poignant, salt smell came up from the waves. Sail after sail of the smacks ceased to be a blur in the dark: each lifted a brown shadowy wing against a dusk through which a flood of myriad drops of light steadily oozed.

Now from this boat, now from that, hoarse cries resounded.

The *Mairi Ban* swung slowly round before the faint dawn-wind, and lifted her bow homeward with a little slapping splash. The *Maggie,* the *Trilleachan,* the *Eilid,* the *Jessie,* and the *Mairi Donn* followed one by one.

In silence the two men on the *Eala* hauled in their nets. The herring made a sheet of shifting silver as they lay in the hold. As the dawn lightened, the quivering silver mass sparkled. The decks were mailed with glittering scales: these, too, gleamed upon the legs, arms, and hands of the two fishermen.

"Well, that's done!" exclaimed Sheumas at last. "Up with the helm, Isla, and let us make for home."

The *Eala* forged ahead when once the sail had its bellyful of wind. She passed the *Tern,* then the *Jessie Macalpine,* caught up the big, lumbering *Maggie,* and went rippling and rushing along the wake of the *Eilid,* the lightest of the Inchghunnais boats.

Off shore, the steamer *Osprey* met the smacks, and took the herring away, cran by cran. Long before her screw made a yeast of foam athwart the black-green inshore water, the *Eala* was in the little haven and nosing the shingle at Craigard point.

In silence Sheumas and Isla walked by the rock-path to the isolated cottage where the Macleans lived. The swallows were flitting hither and thither in front of its low, whitewashed wall, like flying shuttles against a silent loom. The pale gold of a rainy dawn whitened the whiteness. Suddenly Isla stopped.

"Will you be telling me now, Sheumas, which man it was that she loved?"

Maclean did not look at the speaker, though he

stopped too. He stared at the white cottage, and at the little square window with the geranium-pot on the lintel.

But while he hesitated, Isla Macleod turned away, and walked swiftly across the wet bracken and bog-myrtle till he disappeared over Cnoc-na-Hurich, on the hidden slope of which his own cottage stood amid a wilderness of whins.

Sheumas watched him till he was out of sight. It was then only that he answered the question.

"I'm thinking," he muttered slowly, "I'm thinking she loved Ian Mòr."

"Yes," he muttered again later, as he took off his sea-soaked clothes, and lay down on the bed in the kitchen, whence he could see into the little room where Silis was in a profound sleep: "Yes, I'm thinking she loved Ian Mòr."

He did not sleep, for all his weariness.

When the sunlight streamed in across the red sandstone floor, and crept towards his wife's bed, he rose softly and looked at her. He did not need to stoop when he entered the room, as Isla Macleod would have had to do.

He looked at Silis a long time. Her shadowy hair was all about her face. She had never seemed to him more beautiful. Well was she called "Silis the Fawn" in the poem that someone had made about her.

The poem that someone had made about her? . . . yes, for sure, how could he be forgetting who it was. Was it not Isla, and he a poet too, another Ian Mòr they said.

"Another Ian Mòr." As he repeated the words below his breath, he bent over his wife. Her white breast rose and fell, the way a moonbeam does in moving water.

Then he knelt. When he took the slim white hand in his she did not wake. It closed lovingly upon his own.

A smile slowly came and went upon the dreaming face—ah, lovely, white, dreaming face, with the hidden starry eyes. There was a soft flush, and a parting of the lips. The half-covered bosom rose and fell as with some groundswell from the beating heart.

"*Silis,*" he whispered. "*Silis . . . Silis . . .*"

She smiled. He leaned close above her lips.

"Ah, heart o' me," she whispered, "Oh Isla, Isla, mo rùn, moghray, Isla, Isla, Isla!"

Sheumas drew back. He too was like the man in her dream, for it was dead-white he was, with the sweat in great beads upon his face.

He made no noise as he went back to the hearth-side, and took his wet clothes from where he had hung them before the smoored peats, and put them on again.

Then he went out.

It was a long walk to Isla Macleod's cottage that few-score yards: a long, long walk.

When Sheumas stood on the wet grass round the flagstones he saw that the door was ajar. Isla had not lain down. He had taken his ash-lute, and was alternately playing and singing low to himself.

Maclean went close up to the wall, and listened. At first he could hear no more than snatches of songs. Then suddenly the man within put down his *farch-chivil,* and stirred.

For some moments there was dead silence. Then a heavy sigh came from within the cottage.

Sheumas Maclean made a step forward, and his shadow fell across the doorway.

His face was white and tired. It is weary work with the herring: but it was not the sea-weariness.

Isla came out, and looked at him. The singer smiled, though that smiling had no light in it. It was dark as a dark wave.

"Well?" he said.

"I have come?"

"And welcome. And what will you be wanting, Sheumas Maclean?"

"Sure, it's too late to sleep, an' I'm thinking I would like to hear now that story you were to tell me."

The man gave no answer to that. Each looked at the other with luminous unwinking eyes.

"It will not be a fair thing," said Isla slowly, at last. "It will not be a fair thing: for I am bigger and stronger."

"There is another way, Isla Macleod."

"Aye?"

"That you or I go to her, and tell her all, and then at the last say: 'Come with me, or stay with him.'"

"So be it."

So there and then they drew for chance. The hazard was with Sheumas Maclean.

Without a word Isla turned and went into the house. There he took his feadan, and played low to himself, staring into the red heart of the smouldering peats. He neither smiled nor frowned; but only once he smiled, and that was when Sheumas came back, and said *Come.*

So the two walked in silence across the dewy grass. There was a loud calling of skuas and terns, and the hoarse laughing cry of the great herring-gull, upon the weedy shore of Craigard. The tide bubbled and oozed through the wilderness of wrack. Farther off there were the cackling of hens, the lowing of restless kye, and the bleating of the sheep on the slopes of Melmonach. A shrewd salt air tingled in the nostrils of the two men.

At the closed door Sheumas made a sign of silence. Then he unfastened the latch, and entered.

"Silis," he said in a low voice, but clear.

"Silis, I've come back again. Dry your tears, my lass, and tell me once again—for I'm dying to hear the blessed truth once again—tell me once again if it's me you love best, or Isla Macleod."

"I have told you, Sheumas."

Without, Isla heard her words and drew closer.

"And it is a true thing that you love me best and that since the choice between him and me has come, you choose me?"

"It is a true thing."

A shadow fell across the room. Isla Macleod stood in the doorway.

Silis turned, and looked at the man. He smiled. She was no coward, his Silis, he thought, though he called her his fawn.

"Is—it—a—true—thing, Silis?" he asked slowly.

She looked at Sheumas, then at Isla, then back at her husband.

Then, with a swift turn of her eyes, she spoke.

"Yes, it is a true thing, Isla. I abide by Sheumas."

That was all.

She was conscious of the wave of relief that went into Sheumas' face. She saw the rising of a dark tide in the eyes of Isla. He stared at her. Perhaps he did not hear? Perhaps he was dreaming still? He was a dreamer, a poet: perhaps he could not understand.

"*A ghraidh mo chridhe*—dear love of my heart," he whispered hoarsely.

She stared with her seemingly frank but ever unrevealing eyes—the deep eyes of truth as they had ever seemed to Sheumas, and to Isla too, though he knew her as Sheumas her husband could never know her. He now knew that a woman can be made equally of beauty and love and lies.

Isla stood awhile, as though he had not heard. A big, strong man, he was: but he trembled now like a fawn himself, she thought. His blue eyes were suddenly grown cloudy and dim.

He straightened himself. She saw a new look in his face, an awakening scorn, that she knew she could never forget. She shivered. Isla turned. He stumbled through the blinding white light beyond the door. In his ears, the faint lapsing noise of the tide stormed in the doorway. Sheumas did not look at Silis. They listened, till they no more heard the sound of Isla's feet across the shingle that led to the haven.

THE DISTANT COUNTRY.

"He has loved, perhaps; of a surety he has suffered. Inevitably must he too have heard the 'sounds that come from the distant country of Splendour and Terror;' and many an evening has he bowed down in silence before laws that are deeper than the sea."

MAETERLINCK.

THERE is a poet's tale that I love well, and have often recalled; and of how in the hour of death love may be so great that it transcends the height of hills and the waste of deserts and the salt reaches of the sea.

Last night I dreamed of Ithel and Bronwen: confusedly, for a noise of waves and the crying of an inland bird were continuously wrought into the colours and fragrances of places remote from moor and sea, with the colours and fragrances of a land of orchards and pastures and quiet meres, and with the thin, poignant fragrances and acute breadths of colour of the sun-wrought East.

And when I woke, I knew it was not really Ithel and Bronwen, Red Ithel and Pale Bronwen, of whom I had been dreaming. Nor yet of an old grey day, nor of the remote East, but of two whom I knew well, and of this West of rains and rainbows, of tears and hopes, which I love as a child loves a widowed mother.

Then I slept again, and before dawn dreamed, and again awoke. But it was not of Bronwen and Ithel now that I dreamed, but of Aillinn and Bailê the Sweet-Spoken.

Among the stories of the Gael there is one that women love most. It is that of Bailê the Sweet-Spoken. When Bailê, who lived in one part of the country of the Gaels, suffered in any wise, Aillinn, who lived in another part, suffered also and with the same suffering. So great was their love that distance between them was no more than a flow of water between two other flows in a narrow stream. That is love, that cannot live apart. But in an evil hour the hate of a base nature caused a death-image to appear to Ailinn and to Bailê Honeymouth. And when Bailê the Sweet-Spoken saw his dead love, his heart broke, and the grass was less cold than was that which lay upon it. And when Aillinn saw her dead love, her life went away in a breath, and she was more white than were the white daisies in the grass where her great beauty lay like a stilled flame. Each was buried where each fell. Then this wonder was known throughout the lands of the Gaels, that an apple-tree straightway grew out of the grave of Aillinn, which the wind and the sun and moon and unseen powers moulded at the top into the form and head of Bailê; and that out of the grave of Bailé grew a yew-tree, of the upper leaves and branches of which the unseen powers and the moon and the sun

and the wind wrought the fair, beautiful head of Aillinn. That is love, that cannot dream apart. That is love, that for ever remoulds love nearer and nearer to the desire of the heart.

And when seven years had passed, the yew-tree and the apple-tree were laid low. It may be that one who loved not with the great love bade this to be done: for it is only the few who love as Aillinn and Bailê loved, and the smaller or weaker the soul is, the more does it abhor or be troubled by the white flame. But the poets and seers made tablets of the apple-wood and the yew-wood, and wrote thereon amorous and beautiful words. Later, it happened that the Ardree summoned the poets to bring these tablets before him at the House of the Kings. But hardly had he touched them when the yew-wood and the apple-wood were suddenly one wood, swift in their coming together as when two waves meet at sea and are one wave. And the king and those about him could see the pale apple-wood inwoven with the dark yew-wood, nor could any magic or incantation undo that miracle. So the Ardree bade the wood of the love of Aillinn and Bailê be taken to the treasury, and be kept there with the sacred emblems of great powers and demons and gods and the trophies of the heroes. And that is love, that heeds neither the word of man, nor the bitterness of death, nor the open law, nor the law that is secret and inscrutable.

But when I heard a mavis singing above the dew on the white wild-roses, and saw the blue light like a moving blue flame underslidden with running gold, and knew that it was day, I thought no more of Aillinn and of Bailê the Sweet-Spoken, nor of Red Ithel and Pale Bronwen, nor of the far, dim East where Ithel lay among the sands and Bronwen's love flickered like a shadow; nor of the dim day of those four lovers of dream; but of two whom I loved well and who had their day in this West of rains and rainbows, of tears and hopes.

Love is at once so great and so frail that there is perhaps no thought which can at the same time so appal and uplift us. And there is in love, at times, for some, an unfathomed mystery. That which can lead to the stars can lead to the abyss. There is a limit set to mortal joy as well as to mortal suffering, and the flame may overleap itself in one as in the other. The most dread mystery of a love that is overwhelming is its death through its own flame.

This is an "untold story" that I write. None could write it. A few will understand: to most it will be at once as real and as unreal as foam, as no more than the phosphoresence of emotion. One may see, and yet deny: as one may see in the nocturnal wave a flame that is not there, or a star caught momentarily in the

travelling hollow, and know that there is no flame but only a sudden gleam of infinitesimal, congregated life; no star, but only a wandering image. But, also, one may deny that which is not phantasmal. He who is colour-blind cannot see colour: he who is blind to that little infinite flame of life which creates the blue mist of youth and love and romance cannot discern in youth or love or romance the names of those primitive ecstasies that in themselves are immortal things, though we see only their fruitions and decays: and he whose soul is obscure, or whose spirit is blind, cannot see those things which pertain to the spirit, or understand those things wherein the spirit expresses itself.

But for the some who care, I write these few words: not because I know a mystery, and would reveal it, but because I have known a mystery, and am to-day as a child before it, and can neither reveal nor interpret it.

They loved each other well, the two of whom I speak. It was no lesser love, though upheld by desires and fed with flame; but knew these, and recognised in them the bodily images of a flame that was not mortal and of desires that were not finite. They knew all of joy and sorrow that can come to man and woman through the mysterious gates of Love, which to some seem of dusk and to some seem of morning or the radiances of noon.

Year by year their love deepened. I know of no love like theirs.

One hears everywhere that passion is but unsatisfied desire, that love is but a fever. So, too, as I have heard, the moles, which can see in twilight and amid the earthy glooms they inhabit, cannot see the stars even as shining points upon the branches of trees, nor these moving branches even, nor their wind-lifted shadows.

Their love did not diminish, but grew, through tragic circumstance. As endurance became harder,—for love deepened and passion became as the bird of prey that God sets famished in the wilderness, while the little and great things of common life came in upon this love like a tide,—it seemed to each that they only withdrew the more into that which was for them not the most great thing in life, but life.

To her, he was not only the man she loved: to whom she had given the inward, unnameable life as well as that which dwelled in the heart and in the mind, in the pulse and the blood and the nerves. He was Love itself; and when sometimes he whispered in her hair, she heard other words, and knew that a greater than he whom she loved spoke with hidden meanings.

How could she tell what she was to him? She was a flame to his mind as well as to his life: that she knew. But he could not tell her what words fail to tell. She could feel his heart beat: his pulse rose to her eyes as a wave to the moon: in those eyes of his she could see that which was in her own heart, but which she had to

blind and lead blindfold, because a woman cannot look upon that which is intolerable. Doubtless it was not so with him. This she could not know. But she knew her own heart. The untranslatable call was there. She heard it in those silences where women listen.

Sometimes she looked at him, wondering: at times, with sudden fear. She did not fear him whom she loved, but unknown forces behind him. He spoke to her sometimes of that which cannot pass: of love more enduring than the hills, of passion, of the spirit, of deathless things. She feared them. She did not fear with the mind: that leaped, as a doe to the water-springs. She did not fear with the body, for that abhorred death and the ending of dreams. But something within her feared. These things he spoke of were too great and terrible a wind for a little, wandering flame.

Did he not think thus himself? she wondered. Was it because he was a man that he spoke blithely of these far-off, beautiful and terrible things?

Once they were lying on a grassy slope, on a promontory, on a warm, moonlit night. A single pine-tree grew on the little, rocky buttress: and against this they leaned, and looked through the branches at the pale, uncertain stars, or into the moving, dark, mysterious water.

"It is our love," he whispered to her: "we are on the granite rock: and through the tree of our little world

we look at the unchanging stars: and this moving tide is the mystery that is for ever about us and whispers so much, and tells so little."

It was sweet to hear: and she loved him who whispered: and the thought was her own. But that night she lay thinking for hour upon hour, or, rather, her mind was but a swimming thought; a thought that swam idly on still seas in deep darkness. How wonderful were these dreams that love whispered: how . .

But when at sunrise she woke, it was with a sense that the horizons of life crept closer and closer. She smiled sadly as she thought of how measurable are the mortalities we flatter with infinitude: the sands of the desert, the green hair of the grass, the waves of the sea.

Often, of late, she knew that he who loved her was strangely disquieted. "Too many dreams," he said once, with double meaning, smiling as he looked at her, but with an unexpressed trouble in his eyes.

More and more, because of the great, enduring, pitiless flame of love, she turned to the little things of the hour and the moment. It is the woman's way, and is a law. And more and more, compelled by longings and desires, he whom she loved turned to the inward contemplation of the things that are immortal, to the longings and desires that have their roots in the soul, but whose tendrils reach beyond the stars, and whose flowers grow by the waters of life in Edens beyond dream. It may

not be men's way; and he had the fatal gift of the imagination, which is to men what great beauty is to women —a crown of stars and a slaying sword.

They turned the same way, not knowing it. How could they know, being blind? Blind children they were.

He feared the flame would consume them. She feared it would consume itself.

Therein lay the bitterness. But for her, being a woman, the depths were deeper. He had his dreams.

When, at last, the end came—a tragic, an almost incredible end, perhaps, for love did not change, passion was not slain, but translated to a starry dream, and every sweet and lovely intercourse was theirs still—the suffering was too great to be borne. Yet neither death nor tragic mischance came with veiled healing.

Love, won at a supreme hazard (and again, I do not tell the story of these two, who had, and now in the further silences have, their own secret, for ever sacred), proved a stronger force than life. Life that can be measured, that is so measurable, is as a child before the other unknown power, that is without measure. The man did not understand. He fed the flame with dreams upon dreams, with hopes upon hopes; with more dreams and more hopes.

Once, dimly foreseeing the end, she said, "Love can be slain. It is mortal." He answered, almost with anger, that sooner could the soul die. She looked at

him, wondering that he, whose imagination was so much greater than hers, could not understand.

She loved to the edge of death by will. Will can control the mortal things of love. Instinct wore her heart by day and by night. She put her frail strength into the balance, then her dreams, then her memories. Before the end, hesitating, but not for herself, she put her whole mind there. Still, life weighed lower and lower the scale.

One day they talked of immaterial things. Suddenly he asked her a question.

She was silent. The room was in darkness, for the fire had burned low. He could see only the ruddy gleam on the white skirt; the two white hands; the little restless flame in an opal.

Then, quietly, she told him. She had not ceased to love: it was not that.

Simply, love had been too great a flame. At the last, at that moment, she had striven to save all: she had already put all in the balance, all but her soul. That, too, she had now put there with swift and terrible suddenness.

The balance trembled, then Life weighed the scale lower, and lower.

It was gone. That had gone away upon the wind, which was light as it, homeless as it, as mysterious. Out of the balance she took back what else she had put

there: her mind, quiet, sane, serene now, if that can be serene that neither fears nor cares because it does not feel: and the dreams, and desires, that had turned to loosened fragrances and shadows: and hopes, grey as the ashes of wood, that fell away and were no more.

She was the same, and yet not the same. He trembled, but dare not understand. In his mind were falling stars.

"I will give you all I have to give," she said; "to you, who have had all I had to give, I give that which is left. It is an image that has no life."

When he walked that night alone under the stars he understood. Love can come, not in his mortal but in his immortal guise: as a spirit of flame. There is no alchemy of life which can change that tameless and fierce thing, that power more intense than fire, that creature whose breath consumes what death only silences.

It had come close and looked at them. Long ago he had prayed that it might be so. In answer, the immortal had come to the mortal. How little of all that was to be he had foreseen when, by a spiritual force, he accomplished that too intimate, that too close union, in which none may endure! I speak of a mystery. That it may be, that to many, if not all, this thing that I say will be meaningless, I know. But I do not try to explain what is not a matter of words: nay, I could not, for though I believe, I know of this mystery only through

those two who broke (or of whom one broke) some occult but imperious spiritual law.

They lived long after this great change. Their love never faltered. Each, as before, came close to the other, as day and night ceaselessly meet in dawns and twilights.

But that came to her no more which had gone. For him, he grew slowly to understand a love more great than his. His had not known the innermost flame, that is pure fire.

Strange and terrible thoughts came to him at times. The waste places of the imagination were peopled.

Often, as he has told me, through sleepless nights a solemn marching as of a vast throng rose and fell, a dreadful pulse. But, for him, life was fulfilled. I know that he had always one changeless hope. I do not know what, in the end clouded or unclouded that faithful spirit. But I, too, who knew them, who loved them, have my assured faith: the more, not the less, now that they are gone to that "distant country of Splendour and Terror." Love is more great than we conceive, and Death is the keeper of unknown redemptions. Of her, I have had often, I have ever, in my mind the words wherewith I begin one of the tales in this book: "It is God that builds the nest of the blind bird."

IV.

THE SEA-MADNESS.

I KNOW a man who keeps a little store in a village by one of the lochs of Argyll. He is about fifty, is insignificant, commonplace, in his interests parochial, and on Sundays painful to see in his sleek respectability. He lives within sight of the green and grey waters, above which great mountains stand; across the kyle is a fair wilderness; but to my knowledge he never for pleasure goes upon the hills, nor stands by the shore, unless it be of a Saturday night to watch the herring-boats come in, or on a Sabbath afternoon when he has word with a friend.

Yet this man is one of the strangest men I have met or am like to meet. From himself I have never heard word but the commonest, and that in a manner somewhat servile. I know his one intimate friend, however. At intervals (sometimes of two or three years, latterly each year for three years in succession) this village chandler forgets, and is suddenly become what he

was, or what some ancestor was, in unremembered days.

For a day or two he is listless, in a still sadness; speaking, when he has to speak, in a low voice; and often looking about him with sidelong eyes. Then one day he will leave his counter and go to the shed behind his shop, and stand for a time frowning and whispering, or perhaps staring idly, and then go bareheaded up the hillside, and along tangled ways of bog and heather, and be seen no more for weeks.

He goes down through the wilderness locally called The Broken Rocks. When he is there, he is a strong man, leaping like a goat . . . swift and furtive. At times he strips himself bare, and sits on a rock staring at the sun. Oftenest he walks along the shore, or goes stumbling among weedy boulders, calling loudly upon the sea. His friend, of whom I have spoken, told me that he had again and again seen Anndra stoop and lift handfuls out of the running wave and throw the water above his head while he screamed or shouted strange Gaelic words, some incoherent, some old as the grey rocks. Once he was seen striding into the sea, batting it with his hands, smiting the tide-swell, and defying it and deriding it, with stifled laughters that gave way to cries and sobs of broken hate and love.

He sang songs to it. He threw bracken, and

branches, and stones at it, cursing: then falling on his knees would pray, and lift the water to his lips, and put it on his head. He loved the sea as a man loves a woman. It was his light o' love: his love: his God. Than that desire of his I have not heard of any more terrible. To love the wind and the salt wave, and be for ever mocked of the one and baffled of the other; to lift a heart of flame, and have the bleak air quench it; to stoop, whispering, and kiss the wave, and have its saltness sting the lips and blind the eyes: this indeed is to know that bitter thing of which so many have died after tears, broken hearts, and madness.

His friend, whom I will call Neil, once came upon him when he was in dread. Neil was in a boat, and had sailed close inshore on the flow. Anndra saw him, and screamed. "I know who you are! Keep away!" he cried. *"Fear faire na h'aon sùla . . .* I know you for the One-Eyed Watcher!"

"Then," said Neil, "the salt wave went out of his eyes and he knew me, and fell on his knees, and wept, and said he was dying of an old broken love. And with that he ran down to the shore, and lifted a palmful of water to his lips, so that for a moment foam hung upon his tangled beard; and called out to his love, and was sore bitter upon her, and then up and laughed and scrambled out of sight, though I heard him crying among the rocks."

I asked Neil who the One-Eyed Watcher was. He said he was a man who had never died and never lived. He had only one eye, but that could see through anything except grey granite, the grey crow's egg, and the grey wave that swims at the bottom. He could see the dead in the water, and watched for them: he could see those on the land who came down near the sea, if they had death on them. On these he had no pity. But he was unseen except at dusk and in the grey dawn. He came out of a grave. He was not a man, but he lived upon the deaths of men. It was worse to be alive, and see him, than to be dead and at his feet.

When the man Anndra's madness went away from him . . . sometimes in a week or two weeks, sometimes not for three weeks or more . . . he would come back across the hill. In the dark he would slip down through the bracken and bog-myrtle, and wait awhile among the ragged fuchsias at the dyke of his potato-patch. Then he would creep in at the window of his room, or perhaps lift the door-latch and go quietly to his bed. Once Neil was there when he returned. Neil was speaking to Anndra's sister, who kept house for the poor man. They heard a noise, and the sudden flurried clucking of hens. "It's Anndra," said the woman, with a catch in her throat; and they sat in silence, till the door opened. He had been away five weeks, and hair and beard were matted, and his face was death-white; but he had al-

ready slipped into his habitual clothes, and looked the quiet respectable man he was. The two who were waiting for him did not speak.

"It's a fine night," he said; "it's a fine night, an' no wind. . . . Marget, it's time we had in mair o' thae round cheeses fra Inverary."

DALUA.*

I have heard you calling, Dalua,
Dalua!
I have heard you on the hill,
By the pool-side still,
Where the lapwings shrill
Dalua . . . Dalua . . . Dalua!

What is it you call, Dalua,
Dalua!
When the rains fall,
When the mists crawl,
And the curlews call
Dalua . . . Dalua . . . Dalua!

I am the Fool, Dalua,
Dalua!
When men hear me, their eyes
Darken: the shadow in the skies
Droops: and the keening-woman cries
Dalua . . . Dalua . . . Dalua!

One night when Dan Macara was going over the hillside of Ben Breacan, he saw a tall man playing the pipes, and before him a great flock of sheep.

It was a night of the falling mist that makes a thin

* Dalua, one of the names of a mysterious being in the Celtic mythology, the Fairy Fool.

soundless rain. But behind the blurr was a rain-pool of light, a pool that oozed into a wan flood; and so Macara knew that the moon was up, and was riding against the drift, and would pull the rain away from the hill.

Even in dull rain, with damp moss or soaking heather, sheep do not go silently. Macara wondered if they were all young rams, that there was not a crying *uan* or a bleating ewe to be heard. "By the Black Stone of Iona," he muttered, "there is not even a broken *oisg* among them."

True, there was a faint rising and falling *méh-ing* out on the upper darkness of the hillside; but that lamentable sound was confused with the rustling of many leaves of ash and birch, with eddies of air through the heather and among the fronds of the bracken, and with the uncertain hum of trickling waters. No one utterance slid cleanly through the gloom, but only the voice of darkness as it speaks among the rainy hills.

As he stumbled along the path, stony and rain-gutted, but held together by the tough heather-fibres, he thought of the comfortable room he had left in the farmhouse of Padruic and Mary Macrae, where the shadows were as warm as the peat-flames, and the hot milk and whisky had been so comfortable too; and

warm and comfortable both, the good friendly words of Padruic and Mary.

He wiped the rain from his wet lips, and smiled as he remembered Mary's words: "You, now, so tall and big, an' not ill-looking at that, for a dark Macara . . . and yet with no woman to your side! . . . an' you with the thirty years on you! . . . for sure I would have shame in going through the Strath, with the girls knowing that!" But just then he heard the broken notes of the feadan, or "chanter," that came from the tall man playing the pipes, with the great flock of sheep before him. It was like the flight of pee-wits, all this way and that.

"What with the dark and the rain and the whisky and the good words of Mairi Bàn, my head's like a black bog," he muttered; "and the playing of that man there is like the way o' voices in the bog."

Then he heard without the wilderness in his ears. The air came faint but clear. It angered him. It was like a mocking voice. Perhaps this was because it was like a mocking voice. Perhaps because it was the old pipe-song, "Oighean bhoidheach, slan leibh!" "Ye pretty maids, farewell!" "Who will he be?" he wondered sullenly. "If it's Peter Macandrew Ardmore's shepherd, I'll play him a tune behind the wind that he won't like."

Then the tall man suddenly changed his chanter-music, and the wet night was full of a wild, forlorn, beautiful air.

Dan Macara had never heard that playing before, and he did not like it. Once, when he was a child, he had heard his mother tell Iain Dall, a blind piper of the Catanach, to stop an air that he was playing, because it had sobs and tears in it. He moved swiftly now to overtake the man with the flock of sheep. His playing was like Iain Dall's. He wanted, too, to ask him who he was, and whose chanter-magic he had, and where he was going (and the hill-way at that!) with all those sheep.

But it took him a long time to get near. He ran at last, but he got no nearer. "*Gu ma h-olc dhut* . . . ill befall thee," he cried angrily after a time; "go your own way, and may the night swallow you and your flock."

And with that, Dan Macara turned to follow the burnside way again.

But once more the tall man with the flock of sheep changed the air that he was playing. Macara stopped and listened. It was sweet to hear. Was this a sudden magic that was played upon him? Had not the rain abruptly ceased, as a breath withdrawn? He stared confusedly: for sure, there was no rain, and moonlight lay

upon the fern and upon a white birch that stood solitary in that white-green waste. The sprays of the birch were like a rain of pale shimmering gold. A bird slid along a topmost branch; blue, with breast like a white iris, and with wild-rose wings. Macara could see its eyes ashine, two little starry flames. Song came from it, slow, broken, like water in a stony channel. With each note the years of Time ran laughing through ancient woods, and old age sighed across the world and sank into the earth, and the sea moaned with the burden of all moaning and all tears. The stars moved in a jocund measure; a player sat among them and played, the moon his footstool and the sun a flaming gem above his brows. The song was Youth.

Dan Macara stood. Dreams and visions ran past him, laughing, with starry eyes.

He closed his own eyes, trembling. When he opened them he saw no bird. The grey blurr of the rain came through the darkness. The cold green smell of the bog-myrtle filled the night.

But he was close to the shepherd now. Where had he heard that air? It was one of those old fonnsheen, for sure: yes, "A Choiliteach Ùrair," "The Green Woodland" . . . that was it. But he had never heard it played like that.

The man did not look round as Dan Macara drew

near. The pipes were shadowy black, and had long black streamers from them. The man wore a Highland bonnet, with a black plume hanging from it.

The wet slurred moonshine came out as the rain ceased. Dan looked over the shoulder of the man at the long, straggling, crowd of sheep.

He saw then that they were only a flock of shadows.

They were of all shapes and sizes; and Macara knew, without knowing how he knew, that they were the shadows of all that the shepherd had found in his day's wandering—from the shadows of tall pines to the shadows of daisies, from the shadows of horned cattle to the shadows of fawns and field-mice, from the shadow of a woman at a well to that of a wild-rose trailing on the roadside, from the shadow of a dead man in a corrie, and of a boy playing on a reed with three holes, and the shadows of flying birds and drifting clouds, and the slow formless shadows of stones, to (as he saw with a sudden terror) the shadow of Dan Macara himself, idly decked with feather-like bracken, where he had lost it an hour ago in the darkness, when he had first heard the far-off broken lilt of the pipes.

Filled with an anger that was greater than his terror, Dan Macara ran forward, and strove to grasp the man by the shoulder; but with a crash he came against a great slab of granite, with its lichened sides wet and

slippery with the hill-mist. As he fell, he struck his head and screamed. Before silence and darkness closed in upon him like two waves, he heard Dalua's mocking laughter far up among the hills, and saw a great flock of curlews rise from where the shadows had been.

When he woke there was no more mist on the hill. The moonlight turned the raindrops on the bracken into infinite little wells of light.

All night he wandered, looking for the curlew that was his shadow.

Towards the edge of day he lay down. Sleep was on him, soft and quiet as the breast-feather of a mothering bird. His head was in a tuft of grass: above it a moist star hung, a white solitude.

Dalua stood by him, brooding darkly. He was no shepherd now, but had cloudy black hair like the thin shadows of branches at dusk, and wild eyes, obscure as the brown-black tarns in the heather.

He looked at the star, smiling darkly. Then it moved against the dawn, and paled. It was no more. The man lay solitary.

It was the gloaming of the dawn. Many shadows stirred. Dalua lifted one. It was the shadow of a reed. He put it to his mouth and played upon it.

Above, in the greying waste, a bird wheeled this way and that. Then the curlew flew down, and stood quivering, with eyes wild as Dalua's. He looked at it,

and played it into a shadow; and looked at the sleeping man, and played that shadow into his sleeping mind.

"There is your shadow for you," he said, and touched Dan.

At that touch, Macara shivered all over. Then he woke with a laugh. He saw the dawn sliding along the tops of the pines on the east slope of Ben Breacan.

He rose. He threw his cromak away. Then he gave three wails of the wailing cry of the curlew, and wandered idly back by the way he had come.

It was years and years after that when I saw him.

"How did his madness come upon him?" I asked; for I recalled him strong and proud.

"The Dark Fool, the Amadan-Dhu, touched him. No one knows any more than that. But that is a true thing."

He hated or feared nothing, save only shadows. These disquieted him, by the hearthside or upon the whispering moors. He was quiet, and loved running water and the hill-wind. But, at times, the wailing of curlews threw him into a frenzy.

I asked him once why he was so sad. "I have heard," he said . . . and then stared idly at me: adding suddenly, as though remembering words spoken by another:—"I'm always hearing the three old ancientest

cries: the cry of the curlew, an' the wind, an' the sighin' of the sea."

He was ever witless, and loved secret meetings among the hills. No child feared him. He had a lost love in his face. At night, wandering on the sighing moors or on the glen-road his eyes were like stars in a pool, but with a light more tender.

PART II.

OF THE WORLD THAT WAS.

I.

THE SONG OF THE SWORD.

THESE are of the Seanachas told me by Ian Mòr, before the flaming peats, at a hill-shealing, in a season when the premature snows found the bracken still golden, and the ptarmigan with their autumn browns no more than flecked and mottled with grey.

He has himself now a quieter sleep than the sound of that falling snow, and it is three years since his face became as white and as cold.

He had pleasure in telling *sgeul* after *sgeul* of the ancient days. Far more readily at all times would he repeat stories of this dim past he loved so well than the more intimate tales which had his own pulse beating in them, as "The Daughter of the Sun," and others that I have given elsewhere. Often he would look up from where he held his face in his hands as he brooded into the dull, steadfast flame that consumed the core of the peats; and without preamble, and with words in no

apparent way linked to those last spoken, would narrate some brief episode, and always as one who had witnessed the event. Sometimes, indeed, these brief tales were like waves; one saw them rise, congregate, and expand in a dark billow—and the next moment there was a vanishing puff of spray, and the billow had lapsed.

I cannot recall many of these fugitive tales—seanachas, as he spoke of them collectively, for each *sgeul* was of the past, and had its roots in legendary lore—but of those that remained with me, here are four. All came upon me as birds flying in the dark: I knew not whence they came, or upon what wind they had steered their mysterious course. They were there, that was all. Ancient things come again in Ian's brain, or recovered out of the dim days, and seen anew through the wonder-lens of his imagination.

THE SONG OF THE SWORD.

It was in a white June, as they call it, in the third year after the pirates of Lochlin had fed the corbies of the Hebrid Isles, that the summer-sailors once more came down the Minch of Skye.

An east wind blew fresh from the mountains, though between dawn and sunrise it veered till it chilled itself upon the granite peaks of the Cuchullins, and then leaped north-westward with the white foam of its feet caught from behind by the sun-glint.

The vikings on board the *Svart-Alf* laughed at that. The spray flew from the curved black prow of the great galley, and the wake danced in the dazzle—the sea-cream that they loved to see.

Tall men they were, and comely. Their locks of yellow or golden or ruddy hair, sometimes braided, sometimes all acurl like a chestnut-tree bud-breaking in April, sometimes tangled like sea-wrack caught in a whirl of wind and tide, streamed upon their shoulders. In their blue eyes was a shining as though there were torches of white flame behind them, and that shining was mild or fierce as home or blood filled their brain.

The *Svart-Alf* was the storm-bird of a fleet of thirty galleys which had set forth from Lochlin under the raven-banner of Olaus the White. The vikings had joyed in a good faring. Singing south winds had blown them to the Faroe Isles, where from Magnus Cleft-Hand they had good cheer, and the hire of three men who knew the Western Isles, and had been with the sea-kings who had harried them here and there again and again.

From Magnus-stead they went forth swelled with mead and ale and cow-beef; and they laughed because of what they would give in payment on their way back with golden torques and bracelets and other treasure, young slaves, women dark and fair, and the jewel-hilted weapons of the island-lords.

Cold black winds out of the north-east drove them straight upon the Ord of Sutherland. They sang with joy the noon when they rounded Cape Wrath and came under the shadow of the hills. The dawn that followed was red not only in the sky but on the sheen of the sword-blades. It was the Song of the Sword that day, and there is no song like that for the flaming of the blood. The dark men of Torridon were caught unawares. For seven days thereafter the corbies and ravens glutted themselves drinking at red pools beside the stripped bodies which lay stark and stiff upon the heather. The firing of a score of homesteads smouldered

till the rains came, a day and two nights after the old women who had been driven to the moors stole back wailing. The maids and wives were carried off in the galleys: and for nine days, at a haven in the lone coast opposite the Summer Isles, their tears, their laughter, their sullen anger, their wild gaiety, their passionate despair gave joy to the yellow-haired men. On the ninth day they were carried southward on the summer-sailing. At a place called Craig-Feeach, Raven's Crag, in the north of Skye, where a Norse Erl had a great dûn that he had taken from the son of a king from Eireann whose sea-nest it had been, Olaus the White rested awhile. The women were left there as a free spoil; save three who were so fair that Olaus kept one, and Haco and Sweno, his chief captains, took the others.

Then, on an evening when the wind was from the north, Olaus and ten galleys went down the Sound. Sweno the Hammerer was to strike across the west for the great island that is called the Lews; Haco the Laugher was to steer for the island that is called Harris; and Olaus himself was to reach the haven called Ljotr-wick in the Isle of the Thousand Waters that is Benbecula.

On the eve of the day following that sailing a wild wind sprang up, blowing straight against the north. All of the south-faring galleys save one made for haven, though it was a savage coast which lay along the south of Skye. In the darkness of the storm Olaus thought

that the other nine wave-steeds were following him, and he drove before the gale with his men crouching under the lee of the bulwarks, and with Finnleikr the Harper singing a wild song of sea-foam and flowing blood and the whirling of swords.

The gale was nigh spent three hours after dawn; but the green seas were like snow-crowned hillocks that roll in earth-drunkenness when the flames surge from shaken mountains. Olaus knew that no boat could live in that sea except it went before the wind. So, though not a galley was in sight, he fared steadily north-westward.

By sundown the wind had swung out of the south into the east; and by midnight the stars were shining clear. In the blue-dark could be seen the white wings of the fulmars, seaward-drifting once again from the rocks whither they had fled.

Then came the dawn, when the sun-rain streamed gladly, and a fresh east wind blew across the Minch, and the *Svart-Alf,* that had been driven far northward, came leaping south-westwardly, with laughter and fierce shining of sky-blue eyes, where the vikings toiled at the oars, or burnished their brine-stained swords and javelins.

All day they fared joyously thus. Behind them they could see the blue line of the mainland and the dark-blue mountain crests of Skye; southward was a long green film, where Coll caught the waves ere they drove

upon Tiree; south-eastward, the grey-blue peaks of Halival and Haskival rose out of the Isle of Terror, as Rùm was then called. Before them, as far as they could see to north or south, the purple-grey lines that rose out of the west were the contours of the Hebrides.

"Dost thou see yonder blue splatch, Morna?" cried Olaus the White to the woman who lay indolently by his side, and watched the sun-gold redden the mass of ruddy hair which she had sprayed upon the boards, a net wherein to mesh the eyes of the vikings: "Do you see that blue splatch? I know what it is. It is the headland that Olaf the Furious called Skipness. Behind it is a long fjord in two forks. At the end of the south fork is a place of the white-robes whom the islanders call Culdees. Midway on the eastern bend of the north fork is a town of a hundred families. Over both rules Maoliosa, a warrior-priest; and under him, at the town, is a greybeard called Ramon mac Coag. All this I have learned from Anlaf the Swarthy, who came with us out of Faroe."

Morna glanced at him under her dropped eyelids. Sure, he was fair to see, for all that his long hair was white. White it had gone with the terror of a night on an ice-floe, whereon a man who hated the young erl had set him adrift with seven wolves. He had slain three, and drowned three, and one had leaped into the sea; and then he had lain on the ice, with snow for a

pillow, and in the dawn his hair was the same as the snow. This was but ten years ago, when he was a youth.

She looked at him, and when she spoke it was in the slow, lazy speech that in his ears was drowsy-sweet as the hum of the hives in the steading where his home was.

"It will be a red sleep the men of that town will be having soon, I am thinking, Olaus. And the women will not be carding wool when the moon rises to-morrow night. And——"

The fair woman stopped suddenly. Olaus saw her eyes darken.

"Olaus!"

"I listen."

"If there is a woman there that you desire more than me I will give her a gift."

Olaus laughed.

"Keep your knife in your girdle, Morna. Who knows but you may need it soon to save yourself from a Culdee!"

"Bah! These white-robed men-women have nought to do with us. I fear no man, Olaus; but I have a blade for any woman that will dazzle your eyes."

"Have no fear, white wolf. The sea-wolf knows his mate when he has found her."

An hour after sun-setting a mist came up. The wind freshened. Olaus made silence throughout the

war-galley. The vikings had muffled their oars, for the noise of the waves on the shore could now be heard. Hour after hour went by. When at last the moonlight tore a rift in the häar, and suddenly the vapour was licked up by a wind moving out of the north, they saw that they were close upon the land, and right eastward of the headland of Skipness.

Anlaf the Swarthy went to the prow. Blackly he loomed in the moonlight as he stood there, poising his long spear, and sounding the depths while the vessel slowly forged shoreward. By the time a haven was found, and the vikings stood silent upon the rocks, the night was yellow with moonshine, and the brown earth overlaid with a soft white sheen wherein the long shadows lay palely blue.

There was deep peace in the island-town. The kye were in the sea-pastures near, and even the dogs slept. There had been no ill for long, and Ramon mac Coag was an old man, and dreamed overmuch about his soul. This was because of the teaching of the Culdees. Before he had known he had a soul he was a man, and would not have been taken unawares, and he over-lord of a sea-town like Bail'-tiorail.

Olaus the White made a wide circuit with his men. Then, slowly, the circle narrowed.

A bull lowed, where it stood among the sea-grass, stamping uneasily, and ever and again sniffing the air.

Suddenly one heifer, then another, then all the kye, began a strange lowing. The dogs rose, with bristling felts, and crawled sidelong, snarling, with red eyes gleaming savagely.

Bethoc, the young third wife of Ramon, was awake, dreaming of a man out of Eireann who had that day given her pleasure with his harp and his dusky eyes. She knew that lowing. It was the *langanaich an aghaidh am allamharach,* the continued lowing against the stranger. She rose lightly, and unfastened the leather flap, and looked down from the grianan where she was. A man stood there in the shadow. She thought it was the harper. With a low sigh she leaned downward to kiss him, and to whisper a word in his ear.

Her long hair fell over her eyes and face and blinded her. She felt it grasped, and put out her hand. It was seized, and before she knew what was come upon her she was dragged prone upon the man.

Then, in a flash, she saw he had yellow hair, and was clad as a Norseman. She gasped. If the sea-rovers were come, it was death for all there. The man whispered something in a tongue that was strange to her. She understood better when he put his arm about her, and placed a hand upon her mouth.

Bethoc stood silent. Why did no one hear that lowing of the kine, that snarling of the dogs which had now

grown into a loud continuous baying? The man by her side thought she was cowed, or had accepted the change of fate. He left her, and put his foot on a cleft; then, sword under his chin, he began to climb stealthily.

He had thrown his spear upon the ground. Soundlessly Bethoc stepped forward, lifted it, and moved forward like a shadow.

A wild cry rang through the night. There was a gurgling and spurting sound as of dammed water adrip. Ramon sprang from his couch and stared out of the aperture. Beneath he saw a man, speared through the back, and pinned to the soft wood. His hands clasped the frayed deerskins, and his head lay upon his shoulder. He was laughing horribly. A bubbling of foam frothed continuously out of his mouth.

The next moment Ramon saw Bethoc. He had not time to call to her before a man slipped out of the shadow, and plunged a sword through her till the point dripped red drops upon the grass beyond where she stood. She gave no cry, but fell as a gannet falls. A black shadow darted across the gloom. A crash, a scream, and Ramon sank inert, with an arrow fixed midway in his head through the brows.

Then there was a fierce tumult everywhere. From the pastures the kye ran lowing and bellowing in a wild stampede. The neighing of horses broke into screams. Here and there red flames burst forth, and leaped from

hut to hut. Soon the whole rath was aflame. Round the *dûn* of Ramon a wall of swords flashed.

All had taken refuge in the *dûn,* all who had escaped the first slaying. If any leaped forth, it was upon a viking spear, or if the face of any was seen it was the target for a swift-sure arrow.

A long, penetrating wail went up. The Culdees on the farther loch heard it, and ran from their cells. The loud laughter of the sea-rovers was more dreadful to them than the whirling flames and the wild screaming lament of the dying and the doomed.

None came forth alive out of that *dûn,* save three men, and seven women that were young. Two of the men were made to tell all that Olaus the White wanted to know. Then they were blinded, and put into a boat, and set in the tide-eddy that would take them to where the Culdees were. And for the Culdees they had a message from Olaus.

Of the seven women none were so fair that Morna had any heed. But seven men had them as spoil. Their wild keening had died away into a silence of blank despair long before the dawn. When the light came, they were huddled in a white group near the ashes of their homes. Everywhere the dead sprawled.

At sunrise the vikings held an ale-feast. When Olaus the White had drunken and eaten, he left his men and went down to the shore to look upon the fortified place

where Maoliosa the Culdee and his white-robes lived. As he fared thither through what had been Bail'-tiorail, there was not a male left alive, save the one prisoner who had been kept, Aongas the Bowmaker, as he was called; none save Aongas, and a strayed child among the salt grasses near the shore, a little boy, naked, and with blue eyes and laughing sunny smile.

MIRCATH.

When Haco the Laugher saw the islanders coming out of the west in their birlinns, he called to his vikings, "Now of a truth we shall hear the Song of the Sword!"

The ten galleys of the summer-sailors spread out into two lines of five boats, each boat an arrow-flight from that on either side.

The birlinns came on against the noon. In the sun-dazzle they loomed black as a shoal of pollack. There were fifteen in all, and from the largest, midway among them, flew a banner. On this banner was a disc of gold.

"It is the Banner of the Sunbeam!" shouted Olaf the Red, who with Torquil the One-Armed was hero-man to Haco. "I know it well. The Gael who fight under that are warriors indeed."

"Is there a saga-man here?" cried Haco. At that a great shout went up from the vikings: "Harald the Smith!"

A man rose among the bow-men in Olaf's boat. It was Harald. He took a small square harp, and he struck the strings. This was the song he sang:

Let loose the hounds of war,
The whirling swords!
Send them leaping afar,
Red in their thirst of war;
Odin laughs in his car
At the screaming of the swords!

Far let the white ones fly,
The whirling swords!
Afar off the ravens spy
Death-shadows cloud the sky.
Let the wolves of the Gael die
'Neath the screaming swords!

The Shining Ones yonder
High in Valhalla
Shout now, with thunder,
Drive the Gaels under,
Cleave them asunder,—
Swords of Valhalla!

A shiver passed over every viking. Strong men shook as a child when lightning plays. Then the trembling passed. The mircath, the war-frenzy, came on them. Loud laughter went from boat to boat. Many tossed the great oars, and swung them down upon the sea, splashing the sun-dazzle into a yeast of foam. Others sprang up and whirled their javelins on high, catching them with bloody mouths: others made sword-play, and stammered thick words through a surf of froth upon their lips. Olaf the Red towered high on the steering-plank of the *Calling Raven,* swirling round and round a mighty battle-axe: on the *Sea-Wolf,* Torquil One-Arm

shaded his eyes, and screamed hoarsely wild words that no one knew the meaning of. Only Haco was still for a time. Then he, too, knew the mircath; and he stood up in the *Red-Dragon* and laughed loud and long. And when Haco the Laugher laughed, there was ever blood and to spare.

The birlinns of the islanders drove swiftly on. They swayed out into a curve, a black crescent in the blue meads of sea. From the great birlinn that carried the Sunbeam came a chanting voice:

Oh, 'tis a good song the sea makes when blood is on the wave,
And a good song the wave makes when its crest of foam is red!
For the rovers out of Lochlin the sea is a good grave,
And the bards will sing to-night to the sea-moan of the dead!

Yo-ho-a-h'eily-a-yo, eily, ayah, a yo!
Sword and Spear and Battle-axe sing the Song of Woe!
Ayah, eily, a yo!
Eily, ayah, a yo!

Then there was a swirling and dashing of foam. Clouds of spray filled the air from the thresh of the oars.

No man knew that he still lived while the birlinns bore down upon the viking-galleys. Crash and roar and scream, and a wild surging; the slashing of swords, the whistle of arrows, the fierce hiss of whirled spears, the rending crash of battle-axe and splintering of the javelins; wild cries, oaths, screams, shouts of victors, and yells of the dying; shrill taunts from the spillers of life, and

savage choking cries from those drowning in the bloody yeast that bubbled and foamed in the maelstrom where the war-boats swung and reeled this way and that; and, over all, the loud death-music of Haco the Laugher.

Olaf the Red went into the sea, red indeed, for the blood streamed from head and shoulders, and fell about him as a scarlet robe. Torquil One-Arm fought, blind and arrow-sprent, till a spear went through his neck, and he sank among the dead. Louder and louder grew the fierce shouts of the Gael; fewer the savage screaming cries of the vikings. Thus it was till two galleys only held living men. The *Calling Raven* turned and fled, with the nine men who were not wounded to the death. But, on the *Red-Dragon,* Haco the Laugher still laughed. Seven men were about him. These fought in silence.

Then Toscar mac Aonghas, that was leader of the Gael, took his bow. None was arrow-better than Toscar of the Nine Battles. He laid down his sword and took his bow, and an arrow went through the right eye of Haco the Laugher. He laughed no more. The seven died in silence. Swaran Swiftfoot was the last. When he fell, he wiped away the blood that streamed over his face.

"*Skoal!*" he cried to the hero of the Gael, and with that he whirled his battle-axe at Toscar mac Aonghas; and the soul of Toscar met his, in the dark mist, and upon the ears of both fell at one and the same time the glad laughter of the gods in Valhalla.

THE FLIGHT OF THE CULDEES.

On the wane of noon, on the day following the ruin of Bail'-tiorail, sails were descried far east of Skipness.

Olaus called his men together. The boats coming before the wind were doubtless the galleys of his own fleet which he had lost sight of when the south-gale had blown them against Skye: but no man can know when and how the gods may smile grimly, and let the swords that whirl be broken, or the spears that are flat become a hedge of death.

An hour later, a startled word went from viking to viking. The galleys in the offing were the fleet of Sweno the Hammerer. Why had he come so far southward, and why were oars so swift and with the sails strained to the utmost before the wind?

They were soon to know.

Sweno himself was the first to land. A great man he was, broad and burly, with a sword-slash across his face that brought his brows together in a frown which made a perpetual shadow above his savage bloodshot eyes.

In a few words he told how he had met a galley, with only half its crew, and of these many who were

wounded. It was the last of the fleet of Haco the Laugher. A fleet of fifteen war-birlinns had set out from the Long Island, and had given battle. Haco had gone into the strife, laughing loud as was his wont, and he and all his men had the berserk rage, and fought with joy and foam at the mouth. Never had the Sword sung a sweeter song.

"Well," said Olaus the White, grimly, "well, how did the Raven fly?"

"When Haco laughed for the last time, with waving sword out of the death wherein he sank, there was only one galley left. Of all that company of vikings there were no more than nine to tell the tale. These nine we took out of their boat, which was below waves soon. Haco and his men are all fighting the sea-shadows by now."

A loud snarling went from man to man. This became a wild cry of rage. Then savage shouts filled the air. Swords were lifted up against the sky, and the fierce glitter of the blue eyes and the bristling of the tawny beards were fair to see, thought the captive women, though their hearts beat against their ribs like eaglets against the bars of a cage.

Sweno the Hammerer frowned a deep frown when he heard that Olaus was there with only the *Svart-Alf* out of the galleys which had gone the southward way.

"If the islanders come upon us now with their bir-

linns we shall have to make a running fight," he said.

Olaus laughed.

"Aye, but the running shall be after the birlinns, Sweno."

"I hear that there are fifty and nine men of these Culdees yonder under the sword-priest, Maoliosa?"

"It is a true word. But to-night, after the moon is up, there shall be none."

At that, all who heard laughed, and were less heavy in their hearts because of the slaying and drowning of Haco the Laugher and all his crew.

"Where is the woman Brenda that you took?" Olaus asked, as he stared at Sweno's boat and saw no woman there.

"She is in the sea."

Olaus the White looked. It was his eyes that asked.

"I flung her into the sea because she laughed when she heard of how the birlinns of Somhairle the Renegade drove in upon our ships, and of how Haco laughed no more, and how the sea was red with Lochlin blood."

"She was a woman, Sweno—and none more fair in the isles, after Morna that is mine."

"Woman or no woman, I flung her into the sea. The Gael call us the *Gall:* then I will let no Gael laugh at the Gall. It is enough. She is drowned. There are

always women: one here, one there—it is but a wave blown this way or that."

At this moment a viking came running across the ruined town with tidings. Maoliosa and his Culdees were crowding into a great birlinn. Perhaps they were coming to give battle: mayhap they were for sailing away from that place.

Olaus and Sweno stared across the fjord. At first they knew not what to think. If Maoliosa thought of battle, surely he would not choose that hour and place. Or was it that he knew the Gael were coming in force, and that the vikings were caught in a trap?

At last it was clear. Sweno gave a great laugh.

"By the blood of Odin," he cried, "they come to sue for peace!"

Slowly across the loch the birlinn, filled with white-robed Culdees, drew near. At the prow stood a tall old man, with streaming hair and beard, white as sea-foam. In his right hand he grasped a great Cross, whereon was Christ crucified.

The vikings drew close one to the other.

"Hail them in their own tongue, Sweno," said Olaus.

The Hammerer moved to the water-edge, as the birlinn stopped, a short arrow-flight away.

"Ho, there, druids of the Christ-faith!"

"What would you, viking-lord?" It was Maoliosa himself that spoke.

"Why do you come over here to us, you that are Maoliosa?"

"To win you and yours to God, Pagan."

"Is it madness that is upon you, old man? We have swords and spears here, if we lack hymns and prayers."

All this time Olaus kept a wary watch inland and seaward, for he feared that Maoliosa came because of an ambush.

Truly the old monk was mad. He had told his Culdees that God would prevail, and that the Pagans would melt away before the Cross.

The ebb-tide was running swift. Even while Sweno spoke, the birlinn touched a low sea-hidden ledge of rock.

A cry of consternation came from the white-robes. Loud laughter went up from the vikings.

"Arrows!" cried Olaus.

With that, three-score men took their bows. There was a hail of death-shafts. Many fell into the water, but some were in the brains and hearts of the Culdees.

Maoliosa himself stood in death, transfixed to the mast.

With a despairing wild cry the monks swept their oars backward. Then they leaped to their feet, and changed their place, and rowed for life or death.

The summer-sailors sprang into their galley, that they

had pulled through the narrow strait. Sweno the Hammerer was at the bow. The foam curled and hissed.

The birlinn grided upon the opposite shore at the self-same moment when Sweno brought down his battle-axe upon the monk who steered. The man was cleft to the shoulder. Sweno swayed with the blow, stumbled, and fell headlong into the sea. A Culdee thrust at him with an oar, and pinned him among the sea-tangle. Thus died Sweno the Hammerer.

Then all the white-robes leaped upon the shore. Yet Olaus was quicker than they. With a score of vikings he raced to the Church of the Cells, and gained the sanctuary. The monks uttered a cry of despair, and, turning, fled across the moor. Olaus counted them. There were now forty in all.

"Let forty men follow," he cried.

Like white birds, the monks fled this way and that. Olaus, and those who watched, laughed at them as they stumbled, because of their robes. One by one fell, sword-cleft or spear-thrust.

At the last there were less than a score—twelve only—ten!

"Bring them back!" Olaus shouted.

When the ten fugitives were captured and brought back, Olaus took the crucifix that Maoliosa had raised, and held it before each in turn.

"Smite," he said to the first monk. But the man would not.

"Smite!" he said to the second; but he would not. And so it was to the tenth.

"Good," said Olaus the White, "they shall witness to their god."

With that he bade his vikings break up the birlinn, and drive the planks into the ground, and shore them up with logs.

When this was done he crucified each Culdee. With nails and with ropes he did unto each what their god had suffered. Then all were left there by the water-side.

That night, when Olaus the White and the laughing Morna left the great bonfire where the vikings sang and drank horn after horn of strong ale, they stood and looked across the loch. In the moonlight, upon the dim verge of the farther shore, they could discern ten crosses. On each was a motionless white splatch.

THE LAUGHTER OF SCATHACH* THE QUEEN.

In the year when Cuchullin left the Isle of Skye, where Scathach the warrior-queen ruled with the shadow of death in the palm of her sword-hand, there was sorrow because of his beauty. He had fared back to Eiré, at the summons of Concobar mac Nessa, Ard-Righ of Ulster. For the Clan of the Red Branch was wading in blood, and there were seers who beheld that bitter tide rising and spreading.

Cuchullin was only a youth in years; but he had come to Skye a boy, and he left it a man. None fairer had ever been seen of Scathach or of any woman. He was tall and lithe as a young pine; his skin was as white as a woman's breast; his eyes were of a fierce bright blue, with a white light in them as of the sun. When bent, and with arrow half-way drawn, he stood on the heather, listening against the belling of the deer; or when he leaned against a tree, dreaming not of eagle-

* Scathach (pronounced *Scá-ya* or *Skýy-ya*) was an Amazonian Queen of the Island of Skye, and is supposed to have given her name to that island.

chase or wolf-hunt, but of the woman whom he had never met; or when, by the dûn, he played at sword-whirl or spear-thrust, or raced the war-chariot across the machar—then as ever were jealous eyes upon his beauty, and there were some who held him to be Angus Ogue himself. For there was a light about him, such as the hills have in the sun-glow an hour before set. His hair was the hair of Angus and of the fair gods, earth-brown shot with gold next his head, ruddy as flame midway, and, where it sprayed into a golden mist of fire, yellow as windy sunshine.

But Cuchullin loved no woman upon Skye, and none dared openly to love Cuchullin, for Scathach's heart yearned for him, and to cross the Queen was to put the shroud upon oneself. Scathach kept an open face for the son of Lerg. There was no dark frown above the storm in her eyes when she looked at his sunbright face. Gladly she slew a woman because Cuchullin had lightly reproved the maid for some idle thing; and once, when the youth looked in grave silence at three viking captives whom she had spared because of their comely manhood, she put her sword through the heart of each, and sent him the blade, dripping red, as the flower of love.

But Cuchullin was a dreamer, and he loved what he dreamed of, and that woman was not Scathach, nor any of her warrior-women who made the Isle of Mist a place

of terror for those cast upon the wild shores, or stranded there in the ebb of inglorious battle.

Scathach brooded deep upon her vain desire. Once, in a windless, shadowy gloaming, she asked him if he loved any woman.

"Yes," he said. "Etáin."

Her breath came quick and hard. It was pleasure to her then to think of Cuchullin lying white at her feet, with the red blood spilling from the whiteness of his breast. But she bit her under lip, and said quietly—

"Who is Etáin?"

"She is the wife of Mídir."

And with that the youth turned and moved haughtily away. She did not know that the Etáin of whom Cuchullin dreamed was no woman that he had seen in Eiré, but the wife of Mídir, the King of Faerie, who was so passing fair that Mac Greine, the beautiful god, had made for her a grianan all of shining unfalling dew, where she lives in a dream, and in that sun-bower is fed at dawn upon the bloom of flowers and at dusk upon their fragrance. *O ogham mhic Gréine, tha e boidheach,** she sighs for ever in her sleep; and that sigh is in all sighs of love for ever and ever.

Scathach watched him till he was lost behind the flare of the camp fires of the rath. For long she stood

* "Oh beauty of my love the Sun-lord" (*lit.* "Oh youth, son of the Sun, how fair he is!").

there, brooding deep, till the sickle of the new moon, which had been like a blown feather over the sun as it sank, stood out in silver-shine against the blue-black sky, now like a wake in the sea because of the star-dazzle that was there. And what the Queen brooded upon was this: Whether to send emissaries to Eirèann, under bond to seek in that land till they found Mídir and Etáin, and to slay Mídir and bring to her the corpse, for a gift from her to lay before Cuchullin; or to bring Etáin to Skye, where the Queen might see her lose her beauty and wane into death. Neither way might win the heart of Cuchullin. The dark tarn of the woman's mind grew blacker with the shadow of that thought.

Slowly she moved dûn-ward through the night.

"As the moon sometimes is seen rising out of the east," she muttered, "and sometimes, as now, is first seen in the west, so is the heart of love. And if I go west, lo, the moon may rise along the sunway; and if I go east, lo, the moon may be a white light over the setting sun. And who that knoweth the heart of man or woman can tell when the moon of love is to appear full-orbed in the east, or sickle-wise in the west?"

It was on the following day that tidings came out of Eirèann. An Ultonian brought a sword to Cuchullin from Concobar the Ard-Righ.

"The sword has ill upon it, and will die unless you save it, Cuchullin, son of Lerg," said the man.

"And what is that ill, Ultonian?" asked the youth.

"It is thirst."

Then Cuchullin understood.

On the night of his going none looked at Scathach. She had a flame in her eyes.

At moonrise she came back into the rath. No one meeting her looked in her face. Death lay there, like the levin behind a cloud. But Maev, her chief captain, sought her, for she had glad news.

"I would slay you for that glad news, Maev," said the Dark Queen to the warrior-woman, "for there is no glad news unless it be that Cuchullin is come again; only, I spare, for you saved my life that day the summer-sailors burned my rath in the south."

Nevertheless Scathach had gladness because of the tidings. Three viking galleys had been driven into Loch Scavaig, and been dashed to death there by the whirling wind and the narrow furious seas. Of the ninety men who had sailed in them, only a score had reached the rocks, and these were now lying bound at the dûn, awaiting death.

"Call out my warriors," said Scathach, "and bid all meet at the great oak near the Ancient Stones. And bring thither the twenty men that lie bound in the dûn."

There was a scattering of fire and a clashing of swords and spears when the word went from Maev. Soon all were at the Stones beneath the great oak.

"Cut the bonds from the feet of the sea-rovers, and let them stand." Thus commanded the Queen.

The tall fair men out of Lochlin stood with their hands bound behind them. In their eyes burned wrath and shame, because that they were the sport of women. A bitter death theirs, with no sword-song for music. "Take each by his long yellow hair," said Scathach, "and tie the hair of each to a down-caught bough of the oak."

In silence this thing was done. A shadow was in the paleness of each viking face.

"Let the boughs go," said Scathach.

The five score warrior women who held the great boughs downward sprang back. Up swept the branches, and from each swung a living man, swaying in the wind by his long yellow hair.

Great men they were, strong warriors; but stronger was the yellow hair of each, and stronger than the hair the bough wherefrom each swung, and stronger than the boughs the wind that swayed them idly like drooping fruit, with the stars silvering their hair and the torch-flares reddening the white soles of their dancing feet.

Then Scathach the Queen laughed loud and long. There was no other sound at all there, for none ever uttered sound when Scathach laughed that laugh, for then her madness was upon her.

But at the last, Maev strode forward and struck a

small clarsach that she carried, and to the wild notes of it sang the death-song of the vikings—

O arone a-ree, eily arone, arone!
'Tis a good thing to be sailing across the sea!
How the women smile and the children are laughing glad
When the galleys go out into the blue sea—arone!
O eily arone, arone!

But the children may laugh less when the wolves come,
And the women may smile less in the winter-cold;
For the Summer-sailors will not come again, arone!
O arone a-ree, eily arone, arone!

I am thinking they will not sail back again, Oh no!
The yellow-haired men that came sailing across the sea:
For 'tis wild apples they would be, and swing on green branches,
And sway in the wind for the corbies to preen their eyne.
O eily arone, eily a-ree!

And it is pleasure for Scathach the Queen to see this:
To see the good fruit that grows upon the Tree of the Stones.
Long, speckled fruit it is, wind-swayed by its yellow roots,
And like men they are with their feet dancing in the void air!
O, O, arone, a-ree, eily arone!

When she ceased, all there swung swords and spears, and flung flaring torches into the night, and cried out—

O arone a-ree, eily arone, arone,
O, O, arone, a-ree, eily arone!

Scathach laughed no more. She was weary now. Of what avail any joy of death against the pain she had in her heart, the pain that was called Cuchullin?

Soon all was dark in the rath. Flame after flame died out. Then there was but one red glare in the night, the watch-fire by the dûn. Deep peace was upon all. Not a heifer lowed, not a dog bayed against the moon. The wind fell into a breath, enough to lift the fragrance from flower to flower. Upon the branches of a great oak swung motionless a strange fruit, limp and grey as the hemlock that hangs from ancient pines.

II.

THE MELANCHOLY OF ULAD.

In the sea-loch now known as that of Tarbert of Loch Fyne, but in the old far-off days named the Haven of the Foray, there was once a grianân, a sunbower, of so great a beauty that thereto the strings of the singing men's clarsachs vibrated even in far-away Ireland.

This was in the days before the yellow-haired men out of Lochlin came swarming in their galleys, along the lochs and fjords of the west. So long ago was it that none knows if Ulad sang his song to Fand before Diarmid the Fair was slain on the narrow place between the two lochs, or if it were when Colum's white-robes were wont to come out of the open sea up the Loch of the Swans, that is now West Loch Tarbert, so as to reach the inlands.

But of what import is the whitherset of bygone days, where the tale of the years and of the generations is as that of autumn's leaves?

Ulad was there, the poet-king: and Fand, whom he loved: and Life and Death.

Ian Mòr, of whom I have written, told me the tale many years ago. I cannot recall all he said, and I know well that the echo of ancient music that was below his words, as he spoke in the gloaming before the peats, and in the ancient tongue of our people, is not now what it was then.

None knows whence Ulad came. In the Isles of the West men said he was a prince out of the realm of the Ultonians; but there, in the north of Eiré, they said he was a king in the southlands. Art the White, the wise old Ardrigh of the peoples who dwelt among the lake-lands far south, spoke of Ulad as one born under a solitary star on the night of the Festival of Beltane, and told that he came out of an ancient land north or south of Muirnict, the sea which has the feet of Wales and Cornwall upon its sunrise side and the rocks and sands of Armorica upon that where the light reddens the west. But upon Ioua, that is now Iona, there was one wiser even than Art the White, Dùach the Druid: and when questioned as to Ulad the poet-king, he said he was of the ancient people that dwelt among the inlands of Alba, the old race that had known the divine folk, the Tuatha-de-Danann, when they were seen of men and no mortality was upon their sweet clay. The islanders were awed by what Dùach told them, for what manner of man could this be who had seen Merlin going tranced through the woods, playing upon a reed, with

wolves fawning upon him, and the noise of eagles' wings ruffling the greenglooms of the forest overhead?

And of Fand, who knows aught? Bêl the Harper, whose songs and playing made women's hearts melt like wax, and in men wrought either intolerable longing or put sudden swift flames into the blood, sang of her. And what he sang was this: that Ulad had fared once to Hy Bràsil and had there beheld a garth of white blooms, fragrant and wonderful, under the hither base of a rainbow. These flowers he had gathered, and warmed all night against his breast, and at dawn breathed into them. When the sunbreak slid a rising line along the dawn he blew a frith across the palm of his left hand. What had been white blooms, made rosy with his breath and warm against his side, was a woman. It was Fand.

Who, then, can tell whether Ulad were old or young when he came to the Haven of the Foray? He had the old ancient wisdom, and mayhap knew how to wrap himself round with the green life that endures.

None knew of his being in that place, till, one set of a disastrous day, a birlinn drove in before the tempest sweeping from the isle of Arran up the great sea-loch of Fionn. The oarsmen drew breath when the headlands were past, and then stared with amaze. Over against the bay in the little rocky promontory on the north side was a house built wondrously, and that where

no house had stood, and after a fashion that not one of them had seen, and all marvelled with wide eyes. The sunset flamed upon it, so that its shining walls were glorious. A small round grianân it was, but built all of blocks and stones of hill-crystal, and upborne upon four great pine-boles driven deep into the tangled grass and sand, with these hung about with deer-skins and fells of wolf and other savagery.

Before this grianân the men in the birlinn, upon whom silence had fallen, and whose listless oars made no lapping upon the foam-white small leaping waves of the haven, beheld a man lying face downward.

For a time they thought the man was dead. It was one, they said, some great one, who had perished at the feet of his desire. Others thought he was a king who had come there to die alone, as Conn the Solitary had done, when he had known all that man can know. And some feared that the prone man was a demon, and the shining grianân a dreadful place of spells. The howling of a wolf, in the opposite glen that is called Strathnamara, brought sweat upon their backs: for when the half-human wish evil upon men they hide their faces, and the howling of a she-wolf is heard.

But of a sudden the helmsman made a sign. "It is Ulad," he whispered hoarsely, because of the salt in his throat after that day of flight and long weariness: "It is Ulad the Wonder-Smith."

Then all there were glad, for each man knew that Ulad the Wonder-Smith, who was a poet and a king, wrought no ill against any clan, and that wherever he was the swords slept.

Nevertheless they marvelled much that he was there alone, and in that silence, with his face prone upon the wilderness, while the sunset flamed over against the grianân that was now like wine, or like springing blood light and wonderful. But as tide and wind brought the birlinn close upon the shore, they heard a twofold noise, a rumour of strange sound. One looked at the other, with amaze that grew into fear. For the twofold sound was of the muffled sobs and prayers of the man that lay upon the grass and of the laughter of the woman that was unseen, but who was within the grianân.

Connla, the helmsman and leader of the seafarers, waved to his fellows to pull the birlinn close in among the weedy masses which hung from the rocks. When the galley lay there, all but hidden, and each man's head was beneath the wrack, Connla rose. Slowly he moved to where Ulad lay, face downward, upon the silt of sand and broken rock that was in front of the grianân. But, before he could speak, the young king rose, though not seeing the newcomer, and, looking upon the sunbower, whence the laughter suddenly ceased, raised his arms.

Then, when he had raised his arms, song was upon his lips. It was a strange chant that Connla heard, and had the sound in it of the wind far out at sea, or of a tempest moving across treeless moors, mournful, wild, filled with ancient sorrow and a crying that none can interpret. And the words of it, familiar to the helmsman, and yet with a strange lip-life upon them, were as these:—

Ah you in the grianân there, whose laughter is on me as fire-flames,
What of my sorrow of sorrows that is mine loving—
You that came to me out of the place where the rainbows are builded,
Is it woman you are, Oh Fand, who laughest up there in thy silence?

Sure, I have loved thee through storm and peace, through the day and the night;
Sure, I have set the singing of songs to a marvellous swan-song for thee,
And death I have dared, and life have I dared, and gloom and the grave,
And yet, Oh Fand, thou laughest down on my pain, on my pain, Oh Fand.

All things have I thrown away gladly only to win thee—
Kingship and lordship of men, the fame of the sword, and all good things—
For in thee at the last, I dreamed, in thee, Oh Fand, Queen of Women,
I had found all that a man may find, and was as the gods who die not.

But what of all this to me, who am Ulad the King, the Harper,
Ulad the Singer of Songs that are fire in the hearts of the hearers,
Ulad the Wonder-Smith, who can bridle the winds and the billows,
Lay waste the greatest of Dûns or build grianâns here in the wilds—

What of all this to me, who am only a man that seeketh,
Who seeketh for ever and ever the Soul that is fellow to his—
The Soul that is thee, Oh Fand, who wert born of flowers 'neath the rainbow,
Breathed with my breath, warmed at my breast, Oh Fand, whom I love and I worship?

For all things are vain unto me, but one thing only, and that not vain is—
My Dream, my Passion, my Hope, my Fand, whom I won from Hy Bràsil:
Oh Dream of my life, my Glory, Oh Rose of the World, my Dream,
Lo, death for Ulad the King, if thou failest, for all that I am of the Danann who die not.

And when he had chanted these words, Ulad, who was young and wondrous fair to look upon, held out his arms to Fand, whom yet he did not see, for she was within the grianân.

"Then, if even not now at the setting of the day," the king muttered, "patience shall be upon me till the coming of a new day, and then it may be that Fand will hear my prayer."

And so the night fell. But as the screaming of the gulls came over the loch, and the plaintive crying of

the lapwings was upon the moorland, and the smell of loneroid and bracken was heavy in the wind-fallen stillness, Ulad turned, for he felt a touch upon his shoulder.

It was Connla who touched him, and he knew the man. He had the old wisdom of knowing all that is in the mind by looking into the eyes, and he knew how the man had come there.

"Let the men who are your men, O Connla, move away from here in their birlinn, and go farther up into the haven."

And because he was a Wonder-Smith, and knew all, the islander did as Ulad bade, and without question. But when they were alone again he spoke.

"Ulad, great lord, I am a man who is as idle sand beneath the feet of you who know the ancient wisdom, and are young with imperishing years, and are a great king in some land I know not of—so, at the least, men say. But I know one thing that you do not know."

"If you will tell me one thing that I do not know, O Connla, you shall have your heart's desire."

Connla laughed at that.

"Not even you, O Ulad, can give me my heart's desire."

"And what will that desire be then, you whom the islesmen call Connla the Wise?"

"That one might see in the dew the footsteps of old years returning."

"That thing, Connla, I cannot do."

"And yet thou wouldst do what is a thing as vain as that?"

"Speak. I will listen."

Then Connla drew close to Ulad, and whispered in his ear. Thereafter he gave him a hollow reed with holes in it, such as the shepherding folk use on the hills. And with that he went away into the darkness.

When the moon rose, Ulad took the reed and played upon it. While he played, scales fell from his eyes, and dreams passed from his brain, and his heart grew light. Then he sang:

Come forth, Fand, come forth, beautiful Fand, my woman, my fawn,
The smell of thy falling hair is sweet as the breath of the wild-brier—
I weary of this white moonshine who love better the white flower of thy breasts,
And the secret song of the gods is faint beside the craving in my blood.

Fand, Fand, Fand, white one, who art no dream but a woman,
Come forth from the grianân, or lo by the word of me, Ulad the King,
Forth shalt thou come as a she-wolf, and no more be a woman,
Come forth to me, Fand, who am now as a flame for thy burning!

Thereupon a low laugh was heard, and Fand came out of the *grianân*. White and beautiful she was,

the fairest of all women, and Ulad was glad. When near, she whispered in his ears, and hand-in-hand they went back into the *grianân.*

At dawn Ulad looked upon the beauty of Fand, and he saw she was as a flower.

"Oh fair and beautiful Dream," he whispered—but of a sudden Fand laughed in her sleep, and he remembered what Connla the Wise had told him.

"Woman," Ulad muttered then, "I see well that thou art not my Dream, but only a woman." And with that he half-rose from her.

Fand opened her eyes, and the beauty of them was greater for the new light that was there.

"Then thou art only Ulad, a man?" she cried, and she put her arms about him, and kissed him on the lips and on the breast, sobbing low as with a strange gladness—"I will follow thee, Ulad, to death, for I am thy woman."

"Aye," he said, looking beyond her, "if I feed thee, and call thee my woman, and find pleasure in thee, and give thee my manhood."

"And what else wouldst thou, Oh Ulad?" Fand asked, wondering.

"I am Ulad the Lonely," he answered: this, and no more.

Then, later, he took the hollow reed again, and again played.

And when he had played he looked at Fand. He saw into her heart, and into her brain.

"I have dreamed my dream," he said; "but I am still Ulad the Wonder-Smith."

With that he blew a frith across the palm of his left hand, and said this thing:—

"Oh woman that would not come to me, when I called out of that within me which is I myself, farewell!"

And with that Fand was a drift of white flowers there upon the deerskins.

Then once more Ulad spoke.

"Oh woman, who heeded no bitter prayer of my heart, but at the last came only as a she-wolf to the wolf, farewell!"

And with that a wind-eddy scattered the white flowers upon the deerskins, so that they wavered hither and thither, and some were stained by the pale wandering fires of a rainbow that drifted over that place, then as now the haunt of these cloudy splendours, forever woven there out of sun and mist.

At noon, the seafarers came towards the *grianân* with songs, and offerings.

But Ulad was not there.

THE HARPING OF CRAVETHEEN.

When Cormac, that was known throughout all Northern Eiré as Cormac Conlingas, Cormac the son of Concobar the son of Nessa, was one of the ten hostages to Conairy Mòr for the lealty of the Ultonians, he was loved by men and women because of his strength, his valour, and his comeliness.

He was taller than the tallest of his nine comrades by an inch, and broader by two inches than the broadest: though that fellowship of nine was of the tallest and broadest men among the Ultonians, who were the greatest warriors that green Banba, as Eiré or Erin was called by the bards who loved her, has ever seen.

The shenachies sang of him as a proud champion, with eyes full of light and fire, his countenance broad above and narrow below, ruddy-faced, with hair as of the gold of the September moon.

The commonalty spoke of his mighty spear-thrust, of his deft sword-swing, the terror of his wrath, of the fury of his battle-lust, of his laughter and light joy, and the singing that was on his lips when his sword had

the silence upon it. No man dared touch "Blue-Green," as Cormac Conlingas called it,—the Whispering Sword as it was named among his fellows. "Blue-Green," for in its sweep it gleamed blue-green as the leaping levin; whispered whenever it was athirst, and a red draught it was that would quench that thirst and no other draught for the drinking; and it whispered when there was a ferment of the red blood among men who hated while they feared the Ultonians; and it whispered whenever a shadow dogged the shadow of Cormac the son of Concobar the son of Nessa. Therefore it was that of all who desired his death there was none that did not fear the doom-whisper of the sword that had been forged by Lên the Smith, where he sits and works forever amid his mist of rainbows. Women spoke of his strength as though it were their proud beauty. He had the way of the sunlight with him, they said. And of the sunfire, added one ever, below her breath: and that was Eilidh,* the daughter of Conn mac Art and of Dearduil the daughter of Somhairle the Prince of the Isles —Eilidh the daughter of Dearduil the daughter of Morna, the three queens of beauty in the three generations of the generations.

She was not of the Ultonians, this fair Eilidh, but of the people who were subject to Conairy Mòr. It was

* Pronounce *Eil-ih* or *Eily* (*liq.*). Somhairle is pronounced *So-irl'u*.

when the ten hostages abode with the Red Prince that she grew faint and wan with the love-sickness. Her mother, Dearduil, knew who the man was. She put a mirror of polished steel against the mouth of the girl while she slept, and then it was that she saw the flames of love burning a red heart on which was written in white fire—"I am the heart of Cormac the son of Concobar." Gladness was hers, as well as fear. Sure, there was no greater hero than Cormac Conlingas; but then he was an Ultonian, and would soon be for going away, and ill-pleased would Conairy Mòr be that the beautiful Eilidh, who was his ward since the death of Conn, should be the wife of one of the men of Concobar mac Nessa, whom in his heart he hated.

There was a warrior there called Art mac Art Mòr. Conairy Mòr favoured him, and had promised him Eilidh. One day this man came to the over-lord, and said this thing:—

"Is she, Eilidh, to be hearing the lowing of the kine that are upon my hills?"

"That is so, Art mac Art."

"I have spoken to the girl. She is like the wind in the grass."

"It is the way of women. Follow, and trace, and you shall not find. But say 'Come,' and they will come; and say 'Do,' and they will obey."

"I have put the word upon her, and she has laughed at me. I have said 'Come,' and she asked me if the running wave heard the voice of yesterday's wind. I have said 'Do,' and she called to me—'Do the hills nod when the fox barks?'"

"What is the thing that is behind your lips, Art mac Art Mòr?"

"This. That you send the man away who is the mischief that is upon Eilidh."

"Who is the man?"

"He is of the Hostages."

Conairy Mòr brooded awhile. Then he stroked his beard, brown-black as burn-water in shadow, and laughed.

"Why is there laughter upon you, my King?"

"Sure, I laugh to think of the blood of the white maid. They say it is of milk, but I am thinking it must be the milk of the hero-women of old, red and warm as the stream the White Hound that courses through the night swims in. And that blood that is in Eilidh leaps to the blood of heroes. She would have the weight of Cormac the Yellow-haired on her breast!"

"His blood or mine!"

The king kept silence for a time. Then he smiled, and that boded ill. Then, after awhile, he frowned, and that was not so ill.

"Not thine, Art."

"And if not mine, what of Cormac mac Concobar?"

"He shall go."

"Alone?"

"Alone."

And, sure, it was on the eve of that day that Dearduil went to warn Cormac Conlingas, and to beg him to leave the whiteness of the snow without a red stain. But, when she entered his sleeping-place, Eilidh was there upon the deer-skins.

Dearduil looked for long before she spoke.

"By what is in your eyes, Eilidh my daughter, this is not the first time you have come to Cormac Conlingas?"

The girl laughed low. Her white arms moved through the sheen of her hair like sickles among the corn. She looked at Cormac. The flame that was in her eyes was bright in his. The wife of Conn turned to him.

"No," he said gravely; "it is not the first time."

"Has the seed been sown, Oh husbandman?"

"The seed has been sown."

"It is death."

"The tide flows, the tide ebbs."

"Cormac, there will be two dead this night if Conairy Mòr hears this thing. And even now his word moves against you. Do you love Eilidh?"

Cormac smiled slightly, but made no answer.

"If you love her, you would not see her slain."

"There is no great evil in being slain, Dearduil-nic-Somhairle."

"She is a woman, and she has your child below her heart."

"That is a true thing."

"Will you save her?"

"If she will."

"Speak, Eilidh."

Then the terror that was in the girl's heart arose, and moved about like a white bewildered bird in the dark. She knew that Dearduil had spoken out of her heart. She knew that Art mac Art Mòr was in this evil. She knew that death was near for Cormac, and near for her. The limbs that had trembled with love trembled now with the breath of the fear. Suddenly she drew a long sobbing sigh.

"Speak, Eilidh."

She turned her face to the wall.

"Speak, Eilidh."

"I will speak. Go, Cormac Conlingas."

The chief of the Ultonians stared. This doom to life was worse to him than the death-doom. An angry flame burned in his eyes. His lip curled.

"May it not be a man-child you will have, Eilidh of the gold-brown hair," he said scornfully; "for it would

be an ill thing for a son of Cormac mac Concobar to be a coward, as his mother was, and to fear death as she did, though never before her any of her race."

And with that he turned upon his heel and went out.

Cormac Conlingas had not gone far when he met Art mac Art Mòr with the others.

"It is the King's word," said Art simply.

"I am ready," answered Cormac. "Is it death?"

"Come; the King shall tell you."

But there was to be no blood that night. Only, on the morrow the hostages were nine. The tenth man rode slowly north-eastward against the greying of the dawn.

If in the heart of Cormac Conlingas there was sorrow and a bitter pain because of Eilidh, whom he loved, and from whom he would fain have taken the harshness of his word, there was in the heart of Eilidh the sound as of trodden sods.

That day it was worse for her.

Conairy Mòr came to her himself. Art was at his right hand. The king asked her if she would give her troth to the son of Art Mòr; and, that being given, if she would be his wife.

"That cannot be," she said. The fear that had been in the girl's heart was dead now. The saying of Cormac had killed it. She knew that, like her ancestor, the mother of Somhairle, she could, if need be, have a log

of burning wood against her breast, and face the torture as though she were no more than holding a dead child there.

"And for why cannot it be?" asked Conairy Mòr.

"For it is not Art's child that I carry in my womb," answered Eilidh simply.

The king's face darkened. Art mac Art put his right hand to the dagger at his silver-bossed leathern belt.

"Is it a wanton that you are?"

"No. By my mother's truth, and the mother of my mother. I love another man than Art mac Art Mòr, and that man loves me; and I am his."

"Who is this man?"

"His name is in my heart only."

"I will ask you three things, Eilidh, daughter of Dearduil. Is the man one of your race; is he of noble blood; is he fit to wed the king's ward?"

"He is more fit to wed the king's ward than any man in Eiré. He is of noble blood, and himself the son of a king. But he is an Ultonian."

"Thou hast said. It is Cormac mac Concobar mac Nessa."

"It is Cormac Conlingas."

With a loud laugh Art mac Art strode forward. He raised his hand, and flung it across the face of the girl.

"Art thou his tenth or his hundredth? Well, I would not have you now as a serving-wench."

Once more the king's face darkened. It went ill with him, that sight of a man striking a woman, howsoever lightly.

"Art, I have slain a better man than you for a thing less worthy than that. Take heed."

The man frowned, with the red light in his eyes.

"Will you do as you said, Oh King?"

"No; not now. Eilidh, that blow has saved you. I would have let Art have his way of you, and then do with you what he willed, servitude or death, but now you are free of him. Only this thing I say: no Ultonian shall ever take you in his arms. You shall wed Cravetheen, the step-brother of Art."

"Cravetheen the Harper?"

"Even so."

"He is old, and neither comely nor gracious."

"There is no age upon him that a maid need mock at; and he is gracious enough to those who do not cross him; and he has the mouth of honey, he has; and, if not as comely as Cormac Conlingas, is yet fair to see."

"But . . ."

"I have said."

And so it was. Cravetheen took Eilidh to wife. But he left the great Dûn of Conairy Mòr and went to live in his own Dûn in the forest that clothed the frontiers of the land of the Ultonians.

He took his harp that night, when for the first time

she lay upon the deer-skins in his Dûn, and he played a wild air. Eilidh listened. The tears came into her eyes. Then deep shadows darkened them. She clenched her hands till the nails drew blood. At last she lay with her face to the wall, trembling. For Cravetheen was a Harper who had been taught by a Green Hunter on the slopes of Sliav-Sheean. He could say that in music that the druids themselves could not say in words.

And when he had ended he went over to his wife, and said this only:—

"A day will come when I shall be playing you a marriage song. But before that day I shall play to you twice."

"And beware the third playing," said, when he had gone, his old mother, who sat before the smouldering logs, crooning and muttering.

As for the second playing, that was not till months later. It was at the day set of the birthing of the child of Eilidh and Cormac Conlingas.

All through the soundless labour of the woman—for she had the pride of pride—Cravetheen the Harper played. What he played was that the child might be born dead. Eilidh knew this, and gave it the breath straight from her heart. "My pulse to you," she whispered between her smothered sobs. Then Cravetheen played that it might be born blind and deaf and dumb. But Eilidh knew this, and she whispered to the soul that was be-

hind her eyes, *"Give it light;"* and to the soul that was listening behind her ears—*"Give it hearing;"* and to the soul whose silence was beneath her silence—*"Give it speech."*

And so the child was born; and it was a man-child, and fair to see.

When the swoon was upon Eilidh, Cravetheen ceased from his harping. He rose and looked on the woman. Then he lifted the child and laid it on a doe-skin in the sunlight, on a green place, that was the meeting-place of the moonshine dancers. With that he took up his harp again, and again played.

At the first playing, the birds ceased from singing. There was silence amid the boughs. At the second, the leaves ceased from rustling: there was silence on the branches. At the third, the hare leaped no more, the fox blinked with sleep, the wolf lay down. At the fourth, and fifth, and sixth, the wind folded its wings like a great bird, the wood-breeze crept beneath the bracken and fell asleep, the earth sighed and was still. There was silence: for sure, silence everywhere, as of sleep.

At the seventh playing, the quiet people came out upon the green place. They were small and dainty, clad in green, with small white faces: just like lilies of the valley they were.

They laughed low among themselves, and some clapped their hands. One climbed a thistle, and swung round

and round till he fell on his back with a thud, like the fall of a dewdrop, and cried pitifully. There was no peace till a *duinshee* took him by a green leg, and shoved him down a hole in the grass, and stopped it with a dandelion.

Then one among them, with a scarlet robe and a green cap, with a thread of thistledown waving from it like a plume, and with his wee eyes aflame, stepped forward, and began to play on a little harp made of a bird-bone with three gossamer-films for strings. And the wild air that he played and the songs that he sang were those *fonnsheen* that few hear now, but that those who do hear know to be sweeter than the sorrow of joy.

But there is no size to the Sìdhe—size is only a dream of ours that moves against them, and greatens or lessens with their mood.

Suddenly Cravetheen ceased playing, and then there was silence with the Green Harper also. All of the hill-side-folk stood still. When an eddy of air moved along the grass they wavered to and fro like reeds with the coolness at their feet.

Then the Green Harper threw aside his scarlet cloak and his green cap, and the hair of him was white and flowing as the canna. He broke the three threads of gossamer, and flung away the bird-bone harp. Then he drew a reed from his waist-band that was made of beaten gold, and put it to his lips, and began to play. And what he played was so passing sweet that Crave-

theen went into a dream, and played the same wild air, and he not knowing it, nor any man.

It was with that the soul of the child heard the elfin-music, and came free. Sure, it is a hard thing for the naked spirit to steal away from its warm home of the flesh, with the blood coming and going like a mother's hand, warm and soft. But to the playing of Cravetheen and the Green Harper there was no denying. The soul came forth, and stood with great frightened eyes.

"*Shrink! Shrink! Shrink!*" cried all the quiet people; and, as they cried, the human spirit shrank so as to be at one with them. Then, as it seemed, two shining white flowers—for they were bonnie, bonnie—stepped forward and took the human by the hand, and led it away. And as they went, the others followed, all singing a glad song, that fell strange and faint upon the ear of Cravetheen. All passed into the hillside save the Green Harper, who stopped awhile, playing and playing and playing, till Cravetheen dreamed he was Alldai, the God of Gods, and that the sun was his bride, and the moon his paramour, and the stars his children and the joys that were before him. Then he, too, passed.

With that, Cravetheen came out of his trance, and rubbed his eyes as a man startled from sleep.

He looked at the child. It would be a changeling now, he knew. But when he looked at it again he saw that it was dead.

So he called to Gealcas, that was his mother, and gave her the body.

"Take that to Eilidh," he said; "and tell her this is the second playing, and that I will be playing once again, before it's breast to breast with us."

And these were the words that Gealcas said to Eilidh: who in her heart cursed Cravetheen, and mocked his cruel patience, and longed for Cormac of the Yellow Hair, and cared nought for all the harping that Cravetheen could do now.

It was in the Month of the White Flowers that Cormac Conlingas came again.

He was in the southland when news reached him that his father Concobar mac Nessa was dead. He knew that if he were not speedily with the Ultonians they might not grant him the Ard-Reeship. He, surely, and no other, should be Ard-Ree after Concobar; yet there was one other who might well become over-lord of the Ultonians in his place were he not swift with word and act.

So swift was he that he mounted and rode away from his fellows without taking with him the famous Spear of Pisarr, which was a terror in battle. This was that fiery living spear, wrought by the son of Turenn, and won out of Eiré by the god Lu Lam-fáda. In battle it flew hither and thither, a live thing.

He rode from noon to within an hour of the setting of the sun. Then he saw a low green hill rise like a pine-cone out of the wood, bossed with still-standing stones of an ancient Dûn. Against it a blue column of smoke trailed. Cormac knew now where he was. Word had come to him recently from Eilidh herself.

He drew rein, and stared awhile. Then he smiled; then once more he gloomed, and his eyes were heavy with the shadow of that gloom.

It was then that he drew "Blue-Green" from its sheath, and listened. There was a murmur along the blade, as of gnats above a pool, but there was no whispering.

Once more he smiled.

"It will be for the happening," he muttered. Then, leaning back, he sang this Rune to Eilidh:—

Oimé, Oimé, Woman of the white breasts, Eilidh!
Woman of the gold-brown hair, and lips of the red, red rowan!
Oimé, O-rì, Oimé!

Where is the swan that is whiter, with breast more soft,
Or the wave on the sea that moves as thou movest, Eilidh—
Oimé, a-rò; Oimé, a-rò!

It is the marrow in my bones that is aching, aching, Eilidh:
It is the blood in my body that is a bitter wild tide, Oimé!
O-rì, O-hion, O-rì, aròne!

Is it the heart of thee calling that I am hearing, Eilidh,
Or the wind in the wood, or the beating of the sea, Eilidh,
Or the beating of the sea?

Shule, shule agràh, shule agràh, shule agràh, Shule!
Heart of me, move to me! move to me, heart of me, Eilidh, Eilidh,
Move to me!

Ah! let the wild hawk take it, the name of me, Cormac Conlingas,
Take it and tear at thy heart with it, heart that of old was so hot with it,
Eilidh, Eilidh, o-rì, Eilidh, Eilidh!

And the last words of that song were so loud and clear —loud and clear as the voice of the war-horn—that Eilidh heard. The heart of her leaped, the breast of her heaved, the pulses danced in the surge of the blood. Once more it was with her as though she were with child by Cormac Conlingas. She bade the old mother of Cravetheen and all who abode in the Dûn to remain within, and not one to put the gaze upon the Grîanan, her own place there, or upon whom she should lead to it. Then she went forth to meet Cormac, glad to think of Cravetheen far thence on the hunting, and not to be back again till the third day.

It was the meeting of two waves, that. Each was lost in the other. Then, after long looking in the eyes, and with the words aswoon on the lips, they moved hand in hand towards the Dûn.

And as they moved, the Whispering of the Sword made a sound like the going of wind through grass.

"What is that?" said Eilidh, her eyes large.

"It is the wind in the grass," Cormac answered.

And as they entered the Dûn, the Whispering of the Sword made a confused murmur as of the wind among swaying pines.

"What is that?" Eilidh asked, fear in her eyes.

"It is the wind in the forest," said Cormac.

But when, after he had eaten and drunken, they went up to the Grîanan, and lay down upon the deer-skins, the Whispering of the Sword was so loud that it was as the surf of the sea in a wild wind.

"What is that?" cried Eilidh, with a sob in her throat.

"It is the wind on the sea," Cormac said, his voice hoarse and low.

"There is no sea within three days' march," whispered Eilidh, as she clasped her hands.

But Cormac said nothing. And now the sword was silent also.

It was starshine when Cravetheen returned. He was playing one of the *fonnsheen* he knew, as he came through the wood in the moonlight: for in the hunting of a stag he had made a great circle and was now near Dunchraig again, Dunchraig that was his Dûn. But he had left his horse with his kindred in the valley, and had come afoot through the wood.

He stopped when he was close upon the rocks against which the Dûn was built. He saw the blackness of the shadow of a living thing.

"Who is that?" he cried.

"It is I, Murtagh Làm-Rossa" . . . and with that a man out of the Dûn came forward slowly and hesitatingly. He was a man who hated Eilidh, because she had put him to shame.

Cravetheen looked at him.

"I am waiting," he said.

Still the man hesitated.

"I am waiting, Murtagh Làm-Rossa."

"This is a bitter thing I have to say. I was on my way for the telling."

"It is of Eilidh that is my wife?"

"You have said it."

"Speak."

"She does not sleep alone in the Grîanan, and there is no one of the Dûn who is there with her."

"Who is there?"

"A man."

Cravetheen drew a long breath. His hand went to the wolf-knife at his belt.

"What man?"

"Cormac mac Concobar, that is called Cormac Conlingas."

Again Cravetheen drew a deep breath, and the blood was on his lip.

"You are knowing this thing for sure?"

"I am knowing it."

"That is what no other man shall do"—and with that Cravetheen flashed the wolf-knife in the moonshine, and thrust it with a sucking sound into the heart of Murtagh Làm-Rossa.

With a groan the man sank. His white hands fluttered among the fibrous dust of the pine-needles: his face was as a grey wave.

Cravetheen looked at the froth on his lips: it was like that of the sped deer. He looked at the bubbles about the hilt of the knife: they were as the yeast of cranberries.

"That is the sure way of silence," he said; and he moved on, and thought no more of the man.

In the shadow of the Dûn he stood a long while in thought. He could not reach the Grîanan he knew. Swords and spears for Eilidh, before then, mayhap; and if not, there was Cormac Conlingas—and not Cormac only, but the Sword "Blue-Green" and the Spear "Pisarr."

But a thought drove into his mind as a wind into a corrie.

He put back his sword, and took his harp again.

"It is the third playing," he muttered and smiled grimly, knowing that he smiled.

Then once more he stood on the green rath of the quiet people, and played the *fonnsheen,* till they heard. And when the old harper of Faery was come, Cravetheen played the tune of the asking.

"What will you be wanting, Cravetheena-mac-Rury?" asked the Green Harper.

"The tune of the trancing sleep, green prince of the hill."

"Sure, you shall have it" . . . and with that the Green Harper gave the magic melody, so that not a leaf stirred, not a bird moved, and even the dew ceased to fall.

Then Cravetheen took his harp and played.

The dogs in the Dûn rose, but none howled. Then all lay down, nosing their outstretched paws. Thrice the stallions in the rear of the Dûn put back their ears, but no neighing was on their curled lips. The mares whimpered, and then stood with heads low, asleep. The armed men did not awake, but slumbered deep. The women dreamed into the darkness where no dream is. The old mother of Cravetheen stirred, crooned wearily, bowed her grey head, and was in Tir-nan-Òg again, walking with Rury mac Rury, that loved her—him that was slain with a spear and a sword long long ago.

Only Eilidh and Cormac Conlingas were waking. Sweet was that wild harping against their ears.

"It will be the Green Harper himself," whispered Cormac, drowsy with the sleep that was upon him.

"It will be the harping of Cravetheen I am thinking," said Eilidh, with a low sigh, yet as though that

thing were nothing to her. But Cormac did not hear, for he was asleep.

"I see nine shadows leaping upon the wall," whispered Eilidh, while her heart beat and her limbs lay in chains.

" . . . . move to me, heart of me, Eilidh, Eilidh,
Move to me!"

murmured Cormac in his dream.

"I see nine hounds leaping into the Dûn," Eilidh cried, though none heard.

Cormac smiled in his sleep.

"Ah, ah, I see nine red phantoms leaping into the room!" screamed Eilidh; but none heard.

Cormac smiled in his sleep.

And then it was that the nine red flames grew ninefold, and the whole Dûn was wrapt in flame.

For this was the doing of Cravetheen the Harper. All there died in the flame. That was the end of Eilidh, that was so fair. She laughed the pain away, and died. And Cormac smiled; and as the flame leapt on his breast he muttered, *"Ah, hot heart of Eilidh!—heart of me—move to me!"* And he died.

There was no Dûn, and there were no folk, and no stallions and mares, and no baying hounds when Cravetheen ceased from the playing; but only ashes.

He looked at them till dawn. Then he rose, and

he broke his harp. Northward he went to tell the Ultonians that thing; and to die the death.

And this was the end of Cormac the Hero—Cormac the son of Concobar the son of Nessa, that was called Cormac Conlingas.

HONEY OF THE WILD BEES.

THREE years after Bobarân the Druid poet, surnamed Bobarân Bàn, Bobarân the White, left Innis Manainn for the isles of the north, word came to him from the Sacred Isle that he was to beware of three things: the thought in the brain of the swallow, the arrow in the tongue of the fish, and the honey of the wild bees.

This word came to Bobarân in the island that was called Emhain Abhlach, Emhain of the Apple Trees,*

* Emhain Abhlach, Emhain of the Apple Trees, was an ancient name of Arran in the Firth of Clyde. Gaer (Gaiar, Gaith) was the son, and Aebgreiné (Aevgrain), the Sunlike, was the daughter of the famous Deirdrê (Deardhuil, Darthool) and of Naois, the eldest of the sons of Usnach. The Sacred Isle, Manainn, *i.e.* the Isle of Manannan, is the Isle of Man. The Manannan introduced here is the semi-divine son (*i.e.* son in the sense of descent) of the great Manannan, god of the waters, son of Lîr the ancient elemental God. The Innse Gall alluded to once or twice are the Hebrides (the Isles of the Strangers). The Gall and the Gael were the two peoples of the north, the Gall being the Strangers or Scandinavians. The Ultonian King, Conchobar, referred to is, of course, that King of Ulster from whom Naois abducted Deirdrê; and whom, twenty

where he dwelled with his wards, the two children of Naois and Deirdrê: Gaer, a youth already tall, comely and gracious, and lordly as a king's son; and Aevgrain, the Sunlike. The loveliness of Aevgrain was so fair to look upon, that she was held worthy to be the daughter of that Deirdrê whose beauty had set all the ancient world aflame.

When Bobarân the White received this message from Manannan mhic Manainn, Lord of the Sacred Isle and of the Isles of the Gall, he was troubled. That high king meant no juggling with words. Manannan knew that the Druid poet had the old wisdom of the symbols; and fearing lest any others might interpret his message, had sent warning to him in this guise. That, he understood. Manannan Mac-Athgno was old, and had knowledge of desires unaccomplished and of things unfulfilled: doubtless, then, he had foreseen some peril or other evil thing for Gaer or for Aevgrain, or for both the hapless children of Naois mhic Uisneach and Deirdrê.

Yet of the message Bobarân could make nothing. After long thought, he took his clàrsach and went up through the ancient forest and out upon the desert of

years or more later, Gaer (Gaiar), the son of Deirdrê, ousted from sovereignty, and banished to the remote lands of Orcc and Catt (the Orkneys and Caithness), only, however, to recall him to the sovereignty after the space of a year, when Gaer returned to Emhain Abhlach (Arran), to live there "in a dream" till he died.

the great mountain which towers above all others in Emhain Abhlach.

He played gently upon his clàrsach as he went, so that no wild thing molested him. The brown wolves howled, and their fangs whitened under their red snouts; but all leaped aside, and slid snarling out of sight. The grey wolves stood silent, watching with fierce red eyes, but did not follow. When Bobarân came to the last tree of the forest, he looked behind him, and saw an old white wolf.

He stopped.

"Why do you follow me, Oh wolf?" he asked.

The wolf blinked at him, and sniffed idly the hill-wind.

"Why do you follow me, Oh wolf?" Bobarân asked a second time. The old white wolf raised his head and howled.

Bobarân took from the hollow at the top of his clàrsach nine shrunken red berries of the rowan. Three he threw at the white wolf, and cried, "I put speech upon thine old wisdom." Three he threw into the air above his head, and cried, "Tear the mist, Oh wind." And three he put into his mouth, muttering, "By him of the Hazel-Tree, and by the Salmon of Knowledge, let seeing be upon me."

With that he asked for the third time, "Why do you follow me, Oh wolf?"

When the wolf spoke, it was with the tongue of men—

"The spring is come: the red fish is in the river again, the red tassel is on the larch, and the secret thought is in the brain of the swallow."

"There is no swallow yet on Emhain Abhlach, old wolf that has wisdom."

"There is even now a swallow making three flights above your head, and it will fall at your feet."

Bobarân saw a shadow circle thrice before his eyes, and before he could stir a swallow fell dead at his feet.

While it was yet warm he looked into the brain of the bird. Because of the three sacred berries he had swallowed, he saw. Then he was troubled because in that seeing he saw a wild boar turning at bay, and that Gaer the beautiful youth had fallen, and in his fall had broken his spear, and that the boar blinked his red savage eyes and churned the foam between his great tusks, and made ready to rush upon him and slay Gaer the son of the Beautiful One, the king's son who should yet rule the Gaels of Eiré.

With that Bobarân struck three shrill cries from his clàrsach, and ran headlong westward through the forest. And where he lay upon the ground, Gaer looked and saw a dancing flame before him; and before the boar was a sudden rushing torrent, and midway was a whirling sword that made a continuous bewildering dazzle as

of starry fire. And that dancing flame, and that rushing torrent, and that whirling sword, were the three shril cries from the clàrsach of Bobarân the White.

This happened then: that when the druid ran into the glade where Gaer lay, he took his clàrsach and played a spell upon the boar, so that the son of Naois rose, and lifted his broken spear, and strongly bound the two fragments together, and then with a great shout rushed upon the foam-clotted tusks and drove his spear through the red throat, so that it came out beyond the bristling fell, and passed the length of a handsbreadth into the bole of an oak that was behind the boar.

That night, Bobarân and Gaer and Aevgrain had great joy over the fires. Gaer played upon his clàrsach, and sang the chant of the death of the boar; and Bobarân sang the long tale of Naois, the first of the three heroes of Alba, and of his great love of Deirdrê; and Aevgrain, when the stars were come, and none saw her face in the shadow, sang the love-songs of Deirdrê, and the love-song that was in her own woman's heart.

The two men were troubled by the singing of Aevgrain; Bobarân the White because of memory, Gaer because of desire. When she sang no more, both sighed. "I hear the sound of the sea," said Gaer.—"I hear the song of a blind bird," said Bobarân.—"I hear silence," whispered Aevgrain to herself, the blood going to her

face lest even in that silence the secret thought in her heart should take wing, as the quiet owlet in the dusk.

But Bobarân was well pleased that night when the youth and the girl slept. For he had seen the thought in the brain of the swallow, that of which Manannan of Manainn had warned him. For now belike might the prophecy be fulfilled, that Gaer of the race of Usna and of the womb of Deirdrê should become the Ardrigh of the Gaels both of Eiré and of Alba. So he slept.

On the seventh day after that slaying of the boar, Bobarân the White walked under the falling snow of the apple-bloom, in the shore-glades behind the great conical isle that was then called Inshroin, the Isle of the Seals.

He was looking idly seaward, when suddenly he stood as though arrow-fixed. In the bay was a long galley, shaped like a great fish, and with the bows disparted as the mouth of a speared salmon. It was a birlinn of the Innse Gall, and the coming of the sea-rovers might well be for evil.

He heard a strange music, but ear could not tell whence it came, for it was as a sweet perplexing swarm of delicate sounds; and was in the spires of the grass, and the blown drift of the thistle-down, and the bells of the foxglove, and in all the murmurous multitude of the little leaves.

So by that he knew it was a magic song. He took his clàrsach, and played an old rune of the sea, that

Manannan of Manainn had taught him: Manannan, the son of Athgno, of the sons of Manannan of the Foam, son of Lîr, the great god.

And when he had played, he took nine shrivelled berries of the rowan from the top of his clàrsach. Three he threw towards the waves, and cried—

Oh Element that is older than the ancient earth!
Oh Element that was old when Age was young!
Oh second of the Sacred Three in whom the seed of Alldai,
In whom the seed of the Unnameable became the spawn of the world,
Whence the old gods, and the fair Dedannans, and the sons of men—
Oh Element of the Elements, show me the fish of Manainn,
Show me the fish of Manannan with the arrow in the tongue!

And when Bobarân had cried this incantation, he took three more of the rowan berries and threw them on the ground, and they were swift red tongues of hounds that bayed against a shadowy deer. Then, when he had swallowed the three remaining rowan berries, he saw Gaer standing by a rock on the shore, now looking towards the galley—whence came, as a swarm of bees, the perplexing sweet murmurous noise—and now back to the woodland, where he heard the glad baying of hounds lairing the deer.

But while Bobarân wondered, he saw a beautiful naked woman standing in the prow of the birlinn, and striking the strings of a small shell harp, and singing.

And when he looked at Gaer, the son of Naois was in the sea, and swimming swiftly from wave to wave.

But the druid saw that the beautiful woman was an evil Queen; and that in the hollow of the fish-mouth crouched a man of Lochlin, with a stretched bow in his hands, and in that bow a great arrow.

So once more he cried—

Oh Element, in the name of Manannan, son of Lîr!

and then he lifted his clàrsach, and struck three shrill cries from the strings.

Thus it was that where Gaer swam against the sweet lust of his eyes three great waves arose. The first wave bore him down into the depths, so that the arrow that flew against his breast shot like a shadow through the water. The second wave whirled him this way and that, so that the arrow that flew against his back shot like a spent mackerel through the spray. The third wave hurled him on the shore amid clouds of sand.

Bobarân fled to the place where he fell, and stood before him, and played a wind against the arrows that now came from the birlinn like rain. Then he played magic upon the sea, so that the three tidal waves became one, and roared seaward in one high, terrible, crested, overpowering tumult, and lifted the birlinn, and hurled it upon the rocks of Inshroin, so that all there were swept into the sea and drowned.

Then Bobarân was glad, because he remembered what he had heard in Inis-Manainn—that a fair queen of the Innse Gall would seek to lure Gaer the son of Deirdrê to his death, because of what Naois and the sons of Usna had done to her kinsfolk of the far isles.

That night, before the fires, he told of the hero-wars of Naois and the sons of Usna, and of how the queen of the Innse Gall came in her beauty to Naois, and of how Naois looked at Deirdrê, and bade depart the yellow-haired woman with the yellow crown. Then because he was a poet he sang of her beauty, and of the infinite bitter sweetness of desire, and of the long ache and continuous unsatisfied longing that is called love.

When he ceased, he saw that neither Gaer nor Aevgrain listened to his singing voice. But in the eyes of Gaer he saw the infinite bitter sweetness of desire, and in the eyes of Aevgrain the ache and longing of unawakened love.

On the morrow, Bobarân was walking, heavy with thought. Peradventure the day was near when another evil would come to the children of Naois and of Deirdrê. He feared, too, lest he had lit a fire in the mind of Gaer and in the heart of Aevgrain.

While he was yet pondering what thus perplexed him, he saw three drawing near. One was Aevgrain, sunlike indeed in her lovely beauty, but with strange, grave eyes; and one was Gaer coming as Naois when

he was seen of Deirdrê in the woods of Conchobar, laughing with delight; and one was a young man, the fairest and comeliest Bobarân the White had ever seen. He was clad in green, with a fillet of gold, with belt-clasps of shining findruiney. His hair was long and yellow, yet he was not of the men of Lochlin.

He bowed courteously as he drew near. Bobarân saw that he threw three berries of the mistletoe on the ground, and asked him concerning these, and that doing.

"It is my *geas,* my vow," said the stranger. "It is one of my *geasan* that I throw three berries of the mistletoe on the ground before I speak to an honourable one of the Druids."

Bobarân accepted that saying, for it was in the manner of his day.

And because that he himself was under *geas* not to ask a stranger more than two questions, he spoke at once, lest idly he should ask a vain thing.

"Are you of Emhain Abhlach, fair lord?" he asked.

"Yes, I am of the Isle of the Apple Trees," answered the stranger, with grave eyes.

"And your name and your father's name, are they known to me?"

"I am Rinn, the son of Eochaidh Iuil."

"Doubtless Eochaidh Iuil is a king in . . . in . . ."

"What of your *geas,* Oh Bobarân-Bàn?"

At this the druid bowed ashamedly, for he had broken his *geas*. He stood amazed, too, that Rinn, the son of Eochaidh, should know what that *geas* was.

"I am come here," said Rinn slowly, and in a voice so sweet to hear that the druid thought he had heard none so sweet since he had heard Deirdrê singing low as she played at chess with Naois . . .

"That was when Gaer was asleep within her womb," said Rinn. . . .

So, knowing that the stranger could read what was in his mind, Bobarân feared the magic of spells. But when he put his hand to his side, he found that his clàrsach was gone; and when he looked, he saw that Rinn had lifted it from the ground; and when he strove to speak, he understood that by the third berry of the mistletoe the stranger had put silence against his lips.

So, with a heavy heart, he turned and followed the three to the pleasant *lios* which at that season was their home.

At dusk, before the fires, Rinn sang and told fair wonderful tales. And when he had told one tale, Gaer knew that it was of him he spoke: and of how on the morrow he would cross the sea to Eiré and contest with Conchobar, who had been the death-maker for his love Deirdrê and for Naois and the sons of Usna, for the sovereignty of the Ultonians: and of how he would banish Conchobar to the far surf-swept

Isles of Orcc: and of how, after a year of sovereignty, and because of the longing of love and dream of all dreams, he would return to Emhain Abhlach, and recall Conchobar to be Ardrigh: and of how he would live there till he died, and of how he would know love great as the love of Naois, and beauty great as the beauty of Deirdrê.

And in that dream sleep came upon him, and when Gaer slept, Rinn took the clàrsach again, and again played. He sang the song of love. Bobarân saw a forest glade filled with moonshine, and in that moonshine was a woman, white and beautiful, and the face was the face of Alveen whom he had loved. His heart rose like a wave: his life swung on the crest of that wave: and as a wave he broke in a flood of longing and desire at the feet of Alveen whom he had loved long, long ago.

And in that dream sleep came upon him, and he knew no more.

When Bobarân slept, Rinn looked at Aevgrain, whose eyes were shining upon him as two stars.

"Play me no sweet songs, Oh Rinn," she murmured, "for already I love you, Oh heart's desire, my delight!"

Rinn smiled, but he touched the strings of his harp.

"Oh heart's desire, my delight!" he whispered.

"Oh heart's desire!" she murmured, as sleep came

upon her. Then her white hands moved like swans through the shadowy flood that was her hair, and she put sleep from her, and leaned forward, looking into the eyes of Rinn.

"Tell me who you are, whence you are," she whispered.

"Will you love me if I tell this thing?"

"You are my heart's desire."

"Will you follow me if I tell this thing?"

Aevgrain rose. The firelight waved a rose of flame into her face.

Rinn laughed low, and he put his arms about her and led her deeper into the shadow of the lios.

At sunrise Manannan stood on the shore, and when he looked along the suntrack he saw Gaer sailing into the west.

Then he went to the lios. There was no one there: there was no single thing to be seen there save two pale blue shadows lying in the sunway.

Then he awoke Bobarân.

"Put that youth-dream from you," he said, "and answer me. Where is Gaer? Where is Aevgrain?"

Bobarân bowed his head.

"What of the wild-boar that was the peril of Gaer, that was the thought in the brain of the swallow?"

"It is slain, Oh Manannan of Manainn."

"What of the white woman and the death-shaft, that was the arrow in the tongue of the fish?"

"They are in the silence of the sea."

"What of the witching voice of Rinn, the Lord of Shadow, Rinn the son of Eochaidh Iuil, of the Land of Heart's Desire? What of his witching song, that is called the Honey of the Wild Bees?"

Bobarân the Druid bowed his head.

"He put his spells upon me and upon Gaer. I know no more."

"Gaer you shall see once more, for he will come again to Emhain Abhlach, but he will not know you, for you shall be a grey wolf howling in the waste. But Aevgrain we shall not see again. Farewell, Oh daughter of Deirdrê, desire of my desire!"

And with that Manannan turned, and was hidden in a sea-mist, and was in Manainn again, the Sacred Isle.

But already Bobarân had not waited for that going. His fell bristled as he leaped past the lios, and his long howl rose and sank till lost in the silence of the woods.

At sundown on the third day the two shadows in the lios stirred. Sweet clay of the world was upon them again.

"Tell me what you are, whence you are," murmured Aevgrain, her eyes shadowy with love.

"Will you love me if I tell this thing?"

"You are my heart's desire."

"Will you follow?"

Aevgrain strove to rise. The sunflood warmed a rose of flame in her pale face.

"I love you, Aevgrain, because you are beautiful, and because that in you I see the shadow of all beauty. Await here. It is my will."

"I have no love but you. You are my heart's desire."

Rinn sighed.

"So be it," he said. "I will take with me your love. Overlong have I dreamed this dream. Hark to that great sighing!"

"I hear."

"It is the sighing of the world. It is for me."

"For you——?"

"I am called Rinn, Honey of the Wild Bees. I am the Lord of Shadow. But here, Oh Aevgrain, my name is Death."

IN AVALON.*

When Cairill, Ardree of the southlands of Albyn that are washed by the unquiet waters of the Moyle, was hunting, in a lonely place and with only one hound, he found that the two lives which are one life may touch and be at one.

He was stooping over the print of a doe in the bracken, when his hound leaped aside and fled swiftly by the way they had come.

Cairill stared, then moved back a spray of mistletoe which hung from the oak where he leaned. He heard a crackle under his feet, and saw a long, narrow ash-shaft break in two: and his feet trod upon the white hands of a man lying asleep. The man was young. He was clad in green, with a gold chain round his neck, with breast-bosses, necklet, and anklets of pale findruiney. When he rose, he was tall, lithe as a sapling, his face young and smooth as a girl's, his hair yellow-white like the bog-cotton in the shine of the sun.

Cairill looked at him.

* "In Avalon" is the first part of "The Birds of Emar," one of the otherworld tales in *The Dominion of Dreams*.

"Though you are welcome to see," he said, "I do not know your face."

"I know yours, Cairill mac Cairill. And because you have put this slight upon me I will do a hurt to your kingship."

"What hurt will you do, and who are you to do a hurt to Cairill Swiftspear?"

"I am Keevan of Emhain Abhlach.* I can put any evil upon you. But it is my *geas* not to put evil upon anyone who has meant me no evil."

"It is my *geas* to refuse no courteous, kingly offer in place of death or shame."

"That is well. You have done me a wrong by that treading upon me. I am not of your human clan. That tread shall be a bruise upon me for a year and a day. But let it be thus. For a year and a day I will take your shape upon me, and you will take mine; and I will go to Caer Charill, and you will go to Emhain Abhlach: and no one shall know this thing, neither your queen nor any of my lordly folk, nor your dogs nor mine, nor your sword nor my sword, nor spear, nor drinking-shell, nor clàrsach nor tympan."

"And what have I to fear in this?"

* Ciabhan. Emhain Abhlach, the ancient Gaelic name of Arran, is also the Scottish equivalent of the isle of Avalon. Both names mean the Isle of Apple-trees. Ciabhan would therefore be a prince of Faery.

"I have a foe, Fergal. Beware of Fergal at the rising of the moon. And what have I to fear with you?"

"The love of Dorcha, who is my leman."

Keevan laughed.

"That is everywhere," he said; "among the dragons in the stars and the worms in the earth."

"And how shall I know that this is only for a year and a day, Keevan Honeymouth?"

"I swear it by the seven universal things: by the sun and by the moon, by flame and wind and water, the dew, and day and night."

With that they changed shapes, and Keevan went back to Caer Charill, and none knew him from Cairill, not even Dorcha when he lay with her, and she looked at him darkly while he slept: and, in Emhain Abhlach, none knew Cairill to be other than Keevan, not even Keevan's wife, Malveen of the Honey Hair.

Thus was it for a year and a day.

Before the third quarter of that year, Dorcha put a serpent in a pillow of moss, and lay by Keevan to see him die. But the fierce worm knew his kindred, and whispered in Keevan's ear. That whispering made a dream. Keevan rose, and took a reed with holes in it from the wall: and played silence and stillness on Dorcha, and so the serpent stained her white breast with its milk-white teeth, and at that little red spot she died.

And before the third quarter of that year, when, after a long hunting, Cairill lay by Malveen of the Honey Hair, Keevan's wife rose, and made a sign to Fergal. It was at the lifting of the moon. He stood in the shadow of an old oak, and the bow was drawn so that it hummed in the wind like a gnat, and an arrow was in that bow, and the arrow had the poison of moonseed that even the Tuatha Dé fear at the rising of the moon.

But the serpent in Keevan's ear had whispered this also: therefore he played a dream into Cairill's mind: thus the strayed king dreamed, and knew that dream for a divination. So Cairill rose, and threw his green cloak about Malveen, and bade her look if the moon had reached its third change of gold. She looked, and the arrow of Fergal went into her breast, and the moonseed moved into her heart, and she died.

Fergal came near, laughing low. "There will be lamentation in Faery," he said, "but you will be my queen now, Malveen of the Honey Hair."

"Yes," said Cairill, who had taken the arrow from Malveen's breast, "there will be lamentation in Faery."

And with that he flung the arrow at Fergal, and it entered into his eye, so that he knew darkness and silence and was no more.

At dawn the folk of Emhain Abhlach buried them,

in hollowed places under running water, with two flat stones above them pointed flowward.

That night Cairill sat alone. Old dreams were with him. Greatly he longed.

A woman drew near. She was as white and wonderful as moonflame with the evening star in it. She had hair dusky and soft as the long, warm shadows of afternoon. Her eyes were more darkly blue than the wing of the kingfisher, and the light in them was like the dew that hangs in speedwells. Her hands were so white that when she played upon her little gold clàrsach they were the foam of waves in moonshine. Through the green grass her feet moved, wandering lilies.

She played a song upon Cairill.

It was so passing sweet that his life died to a breath.

"What is the song?" he said.

"The song of longing," she said. Her voice was as an eddy of twilight air above white clover.

She played again. It was so wild a music that the blood clanged against his heart like a storm of swords against a shield.

"What is that song?" he asked.

"The song of desire," he said. Her voice was as the gathering of wind in woods.

She played again. He heard the waves of the sea lapping the snows on the summits of great hills, and

all the white sap and green wonder of the earth moving into flame, and betwixt sun and moon the myriad tempest of the snow of stars.

"What is that song?" he asked.

"The song of love," she said. Her voice was as the still breath of a flower.

"My name is Esmar," she whispered, "and I will come again. You are my desire and my one love."

But he did not see her again till he was once more in Caer Charill, and Keevan was in his own shape and in Emhain Abhlach again.

One day, when he was throwing javelins at an oaken disc, he saw a woman. She was more beautiful than any woman he had seen. She was fair as Emar, but her beauty was the beauty of a woman and not of those behind the dew and the moonshine.

"Who and whence are you, Oh fair one?" he asked.

"I am Emar," she said. Then she wooed him, and he made her his queen.

At the marriage feast a stranger rose.

He put down his drinking shell, and when he spoke his voice made a sound like a distant horn against the shields on the wall.

"I claim a boon," he said.

"It is my *geas* not to refuse a boon to a stranger," said Cairill.

"I am Balva of Emhain Abhlach. Emar put love upon me long ago. I claim her as my boon."

Cairill rose.

"Take my life," he said.

But Emar went to his side. "Not so," she said. Then she turned to Balva.

"This day year you may come again." With that he smiled, and gave that respite, and went away.

But in that year Cairill and Emar knew the depth and wonder of love. "I must go, but I will come again," she said, when the day drew near. Then she told Cairill what to do.

On the dusk of the day when Balva came again and took Emar with him, Cairill put dew on his eyelids, and made a twisted wand out of withes of hazel and rowan, and at the rising of the moon went forth, disguised as a blind beggar playing on a reed-flute.

When he came upon Balva and Emar, Balva spoke.

"That is a sweet-singing flute, Blind One. If you will give it to me, I will give you your heart's desire. That is my *geas,* if I ask for a flute, a falcon, a hound, or a woman."

Cairill laughed. He put his blindness from him. "Give me Emar," he said.

For a year thereafter Cairill and Emar knew deep joy.

On the night when labour came upon her, a wind struck the place where she lay, and the child was

whirled away like a blown leaf. Cairill was wrought with anger and grief, but Emar said no word. She dreamed against the dawn.

At dawn a young man approached them. He was more fair than any man Cairill had even seen, fairer than Balva, fairer than Keevan. He came like spring through green woods.

"The hour is come," he said looking at Emar.

"The hour is come," he said again, looking at Cairill.

"Who is this grown man of youth, with the beautiful years upon him?" asked Cairill.

"It is our son Ailill," answered Emar, "he who was born last night."

Emar rose and kissed Cairill on the lips. "Farewell, dear mortal love," she said.

Then Ailill took the reed-flute wherewith Cairill had won Emar again, and played old age upon Cairill, so that he grew white, and withered as an elm-leaf. When he was but a shadow, Ailill played away the shadow of that shadow, and then the idle breath went out upon the wind.

III.

THE WASHER OF THE FORD.

I.

When Torcall the Harper heard of the death of his friend, Aodh-of-the-Songs, he made a vow to mourn for him for three seasons — a green-time, an apple-time, and a snow-time.

There was sorrow upon him because of that death. True, Aodh was not of his kindred, but the singer had saved the harper's life when his friend was fallen in the Field of Spears.

Torcall was of the people of the north—of the men of Lochlin. His song was of the fjords and of strange gods, of the sword and the war-galley, of the red blood and the white breast, of Odin and Thor and Freya, of Balder and the Dream-God that sits in the rainbow, of the starry North, of the flames of pale blue and flushing rose that play around the Pole, of sudden death in battle, and of Valhalla.

Aodh was of the south isles, where these shake under the thunder of the western seas. His clan was

of the isle that is now called Barra, and was then Aoidû; but his mother was a woman out of a royal rath in Banba, as men of old called Eiré or Eireann. She was so fair that a man died of his desire of her. He was named Ulad, and was a prince. "The Melancholy of Ulad" was long sung in his land after his end in the dark swamp, where he heard a singing, and went laughing glad to his death. Another man was made a prince because of her. This was Aodh the Harper, out of the Hebrid Isles. He won the heart out of her, and it was his from the day she heard his music and felt his eyes flame upon her. Before the child was born, she said, "He shall be the son of love. He shall be called Aodh. He shall be called Aodh-of-the-Songs." And so it was.

Sweet were his songs. He loved, and he sang, and he died.

And when Torcall that was his friend knew this sorrow, he rose and made his vow, and went out for evermore from the place where he was.

Since the hour of the Field of Spears he had been blind. Torcall Dall he was upon men's lips thereafter. His harp had a moonshine wind upon it from that day, it was said: a beautiful strange harping when he went down through the glen, or out upon the sandy machar by the shore, and played what the wind sang, and the grass whispered, and the tree murmured, and the sea muttered or cried hollowly in the dark.

Because there was no sight to his eyes, men said he saw and he heard. What was it he heard and saw that they saw not and heard not! It was in the voice that sighed in the strings of his harp, so the saying was.

When he rose and went away from his place, the Maormor asked him if he went north, as the blood sang; or south, as the heart cried; or west, as the dead go; or east, as the light comes.

"I go east," answered Torcall Dall.

"And why so, Blind Harper?"

"For there is darkness always upon me, and I go where the light comes."

On that night of the nights, a fair wind blowing out of the west, Torcall the Harper set forth in a galley. It splashed in the moonshine as it was rowed swiftly by nine men.

"Sing us a song, O Torcall Dall!" they cried.

"Sing us a song, Torcall of Lochlin," said the man who steered. He and all his company were of the Gael: the Harper only was of the Northmen.

"What shall I sing?" he asked. "Shall it be of war that you love, or of women that twine you like silk o' the kine; or shall it be of death that is your meed; or of your dread, the Spears of the North?"

A low sullen growl went from beard to beard.

"We are under *ceangal,* Blind Harper," said the

steersman, with downcast eyes because of his flaming wrath; "we are under bond to take you safe to the mainland, but we have sworn no vow to sit still under the lash of your tongue. 'Twas a wind-fleet arrow that sliced the sight out of your eyes: have a care lest a sudden sword-wind sweep the breath out of your body."

Torcall laughed a low, quiet laugh.

"Is it death I am fearing now—I who have washed my hands in blood, and had love, and known all that is given to man? But I will sing you a song, I will."

And with that he took his harp, and struck the strings.

A lonely stream there is afar in a lone dim land:
It hath white dust for shore it has, white bones bestrew the strand:
The only thing that liveth there is a naked leaping sword;
But I, who a seer am, have seen the whirling hand
Of the Washer of the Ford.

A shadowy shape of cloud and mist, of gloom and night, she stands,
The Washer of the Ford:
She laughs, at times, and strews the dust through the hollow of her hands.

She counts the sins of all men there, and slays the red-stained horde—
The ghosts of all the sins of men must know the whirling sword
Of the Washer of the Ford.

She stoops and laughs when in the dust she sees a writhing limb:
"Go back into the ford," she says, "and hither and thither swim;
Then I shall wash you white as snow, and shall take you by the hand,

And slay you here in the silence with this my whirling brand,
And trample you into the dust of this white windless sand—"
This is the laughing word
Of the Washer of the Ford
Along that silent strand.

There was silence for a time after Torcall Dall sang that song. The oars took up the moonshine and flung it hither and thither like loose shining crystals. The foam at the prow curled and leaped.

Suddenly one of the rowers broke into a long, low chant—

Yo, eily-a-ho, ayah-a-ho, eily-ayah-a-ho,
Singeth the Sword
Eily-a-ho, ayah-a-ho, eily-ayah-a-ho,
Of the Washer of the Ford!

And at that all ceased from rowing. Standing erect, they lifted up their oars against the stars, and the wild voices flew out upon the night—

Yo, eily-a-ho, ayah-a-ho, eily-ayah-a-ho,
Singeth the Sword
Eily-a-ho, ayah-a-ho, eily-ayah-a-ho,
Of the Washer of the Ford!

Torcall Dall laughed. Then he drew his sword from his side and plunged it into the sea. When he drew the blade out of the water and whirled it on high, all the white shining drops of it swirled about his head like a sleety rain.

And at that the steersman let go the steering-oar

and drew his sword, and clove a flowing wave. But with the might of his blow the sword spun him round, and the sword sliced away the ear of the man who had the sternmost oar. Then there was blood in the eyes of all there. The man staggered, and felt for his knife, and it was in the heart of the steersman.

Then because these two men were leaders, and had had a blood-feud, and because all there, save Torcall, were of one or the other side, swords and knives sang a song.

The rowers dropped their oars; and four men fought against three.

Torcall laughed, and lay back in his place. While out of the wandering wave the death of each man clambered into the hollow of the boat, and breathed its chill upon its man, Torcall the Blind took his harp. He sang this song, with the swirling spray against his face, and the smell of blood in his nostrils, and his feet dabbling in the red tide that rose there.

Oh, 'tis a good thing the red blood, by Odin his word!
And a good thing it is to hear it bubbling deep.
And when we hear the laughter of the Sword,
Oh, the corbies croak, and the old wail, and the women weep!
And busy will she be there where she stands,
Washing the red out of the sins of all this slaying horde;
And trampling the bones of them into white powdery sands,
And laughing low at the thrist of her thirsty sword—
The Washer of the Ford!

When he had sung that song there was only one man whose pulse still beat, and he was at the bow.

"A bitter black curse upon you, Torcall Dall!" he groaned out of the ooze of blood that was in his mouth.

"And who will you be?" said the Blind Harper.

"I am Fergus, the son of Art, the son of Fergus of the Two Dûns."

"Well, it is a song for your death I will make, Fergus mac Art mhic Fheargus: and because you are the last."

With that Torcall struck a sob out of his harp, and he sang—

Oh, death of Fergus, that is lying in the boat here
Betwixt the man of the red hair and him of the black beard,
Rise now, and out of your cold white eyes take out the fear,
And let Fergus mac Art mhic Fheargus see his weird!

Sure, now, it's a blind man I am, but I'm thinking I see
The shadow of you crawling across the dead:
Soon you will twine your arm around his shaking knee,
And be whispering your silence into his listless head.

And that is why, Oh Fergus——

But here the man hurled his sword into the sea, and with a choking cry fell forward; and upon the White Sands he was, beneath the trampling feet of the Washer of the Ford.

II.

It was a fair wind beneath the stars that night. At dawn the mountains of Skye were like turrets of a great Dûn against the east.

But Torcall the blind Harper did not see that thing. Sleep, too, was upon him. He smiled in that sleep, for in his mind he saw the dead men, that were of the alien people, his foes, draw near the stream that was in a far place. The shaking of them, poor tremulous frostbit leaves they were, thin and sere, made the only breath there was in that desert.

At the ford—this is what he saw in his vision—they fell down like stricken deer with the hounds upon them.

"What is this stream?" they cried in the thin voice of rain across the moors.

"The River of Blood," said a voice.

"And who are you that are in the silence?"

"I am the Washer of the Ford."

And with that each red soul was seized and thrown into the water of the ford; and when white as a sheep-bone on the hill, was taken in one hand by the Washer of the Ford and flung into the air, where no wind was and where sound was dead, and was then severed this way and that, in four whirling blows of the sword from the

four quarters of the world. Then it was that the Washer of the Ford trampled upon what fell to the ground, till under the feet of her was only a white sand, white as powder, light as the dust of the yellow flowers that grow in the grass.

It was at that Torcall Dall smiled in his sleep. He did not hear the washing of the sea; no, nor any idle plashing of the unoared boat. Then he dreamed, and it was of the woman he had left, seven summer-sailings ago in Lochlin. He thought her hand was in his, and that her heart was against his.

"Ah, dear beautiful heart of woman," he said, "and what is the pain that has put a shadow upon you?"

It was a sweet voice that he heard coming out of sleep.

"Torcall, it is the weary love I have."

"Ah, heart o' me, dear! sure 'tis a bitter pain I have had too, and I away from you all these years."

"There's a man's pain, and there's a woman's pain."

"By the blood of Balder, Hildyr, I would have both upon me to take it off the dear heart that is here."

"Torcall!"

"Yes, white one."

"We are not alone, we two in the dark."

And when she had said that thing, Torcall felt two baby arms go round his neck, and two leaves of a wild-rose press cool and sweet against his lips.

"Ah! what is this?" he cried, with his heart beatting, and the blood in his body singing a glad song.

A low voice crooned in his ear: a bitter-sweet song it was, passing sweet, passing bitter.

"Ah, white one, white one," he moaned; "ah, the wee fawn o' me! Baby o' foam, bonnie wee lass, put your sight upon me that I may see the blue eyes that are mine too and Hildyr's."

But the child only nestled closer. Like a fledgling in a great nest she was. If God heard her song, He was a glad God that day. The blood that was in her body called to the blood that was in his body. He could say no word. The tears were in his blind eyes.

Then Hildyr leaned into the dark, and took his harp, and played upon it. It was of the fonnsheen he had learned, far, far away, where the isles are.

She sang: but he could not hear what she sang.

Then the little lips, that were like a cool wave upon the dry sand of his life, whispered into a low song: and the wavering of it was like this in his brain—

Where the winds gather
  The souls of the dead,
Oh Torcall, my father,
  My soul is led!

In Hildyr-mead
  I was thrown, I was sown:
Out of thy seed
  I am sprung, I am blown!

But where is the way
  For Hildyr and me,
By the hill-moss grey
  Or the grey sea?

For a river is here,
  And a whirling Sword—
And a Woman washing
  By a Ford!

With that, Torcall Dall gave a wild cry, and sheathed an arm about the wee white one, and put out a hand to the bosom that loved him. But there was no white breast there, and no white babe: and what was against his lips was his own hand red with blood.

"Oh Hildyr!" he cried.

But only the splashing of the waves did he hear.

"Oh white one!" he cried.

But only the scream of a sea-mew, as it hovered over that boat filled with dead men, made answer.

III.

All day the Blind Harper steered the galley of the dead. There was a faint wind moving out of the west. The boat went before it, slow, and with a low, sighing wash.

Torcall saw the red gaping wounds of the dead, and the glassy eyes of the nine men.

"It is better not to be blind and to see the dead," he muttered, "than to be blind and to see the dead."

The man who had been steersman leaned against him. He took him in his shuddering grip and thrust him into the sea.

But when, an hour later, he put his hand to the coolness of the water, he drew it back with a cry, for it was on the cold, stiff face of the dead man that it had fallen. The long hair had caught in a cleft in the leather where the withes had given.

For another hour Torcall sat with his chin in his right hand, and his unseeing eyes staring upon the dead. He heard no sound at all, save the lap of wave, and the *suss* of spray against spray, and a bubbling beneath the boat, and the low, steady swish of the body that trailed alongside the steering oar.

At the second hour before sundown he lifted his head. The sound he heard was the sound of waves beating upon rocks.

At the hour before sundown he moved the oar rapidly to and fro, and cut away the body that trailed behind the boat. The noise of the waves upon the rocks was now a loud song.

When the last sunfire burned upon his neck, and made the long hair upon his shoulders ashine, he smelt the green smell of grass. Then it was too that he heard the muffled fall of the sea, in a quiet haven, where shelves of sand were.

He followed that sound, and while he strained to

hear any voice the boat grided upon the sand, and drifted to one side. Taking his harp, Torcall drove an oar into the sand, and leaped onto the shore. When he was there, he listened. There was silence. Far, far away he heard the falling of a mountain torrent, and the thin, faint cry of an eagle, where the sun-flame dyed its eyrie as with streaming blood.

So he lifted his harp, and, harping low, with an old broken song on his lips, moved away from that place, and gave no more thought to the dead.

It was deep gloaming when he came to a wood. He feit the cold green breath of it.

"Come," said a voice, low and sweet.

"And who will *you* be?" asked Torcall the Harper, trembling because of the sudden voice in the stillness.

"I am a child, and here is my hand, and I will lead you, Torcall of Lochlin."

The blind man had fear upon him.

"Who are you that in a strange place are for knowing who I am?"

"Come."

"Aye, sure, it is coming I am, white one; but tell me who you are, and whence you came, and whither we go."

Then a voice that he knew sang:

Oh where the winds gather
  The souls of the dead,
Oh Torcall, my father,
  My soul is led!

But a river is here,
  And a whirling Sword—
And a Woman washing
  By a Ford!

Torcall Dall was as the last leaf on a tree at that.

"Were you on the boat?" he whispered hoarsely.

But it seemed to him that another voice answered: *"Yea, even so."*

"Tell me, for I have blindness: Is it peace?"

"It is peace."

"Are you man, or child, or of the Hidden People?"

"I am a shepherd."

"A shepherd? Then, sure, you will guide me through this wood? And what will be beyond this wood?"

"A river."

"And what river will that be?"

"Deep and terrible. It runs through the Valley of the Shadow."

"And is there no ford there?"

"Aye, there is a ford."

"And who will guide me across that ford?"

"She."

"Who?"

"The Washer of the Ford."

But hereat Torcall Dall gave a sore cry and snatched his hand away, and fled sidelong into an alley of the wood.

It was moonshine when he lay down, weary. The sound of flowing water filled his ears.

"Come," said a voice.

So he rose and went. When the cold breath of the water was upon his face, the guide that led him put a fruit into his hand.

"Eat, Torcall Dall!"

He ate. He was no more Torcall Dall. He felt his sight coming upon him again. Out of the blackness shadows came; out of the shadows, the great boughs of trees; from the boughs, dark branches and dark clusters of leaves; above the branches, white stars; below the branches, white flowers; and beyond these, the moonshine on the grass and the moonfire on the flowing of a river dark and deep.

"Take your harp, Oh Harper, and sing the song of what you see."

Torcall heard the voice, but saw no one. No shadow moved. Then he walked out upon the moonlit grass; and at the ford he saw a woman stooping and washing shroud after shroud of woven moonbeams; washing them there in the flowing water, and singing low a song that he did not hear. He did not see her face. But she was young, and with long black hair that fell like the shadow of night over a white rock.

So Torcall took his harp, and he sang:

Glory to the great Gods, it is no Sword I am seeing;
Nor do I see aught but the flowing of a river.
And I see shadows on the flow that are ever fleeing,
And I see a woman washing shrouds for ever and ever.

Then he ceased, for he heard the woman sing:

Glory to God on high, and to Mary, Mother of Jesus,
Here am I washing away the sins of the shriven,
Oh Torcall of Lochlin, throw off the red sins that ye cherish
And I will be giving you the washen shroud that they wear in Heaven.

Filled with a great awe, Torcall bowed his head. Then once more he took his harp, and he sang:

Oh well it is I am seeing, Woman of the Shrouds,
That you have not for me any whirling of the Sword;
I have lost my gods, Oh woman, so what will the name be
Of thee and thy gods, Oh woman that art Washer of the Ford?

But the woman did not look up from the dark water, nor did she cease from washing the shrouds made of the woven moonbeams. The Harper heard this song above the sighing of the water:

It is Mary Magdalene my name is, and I loved Christ.
And Christ is the Son of God and of Mary the Mother of Heaven.
And this river is the river of death, and the shadows
Are the fleeing souls that are lost if they be not shriven.

Then Torcall drew closer to the stream. A melancholy wind was upon it.

"Where are all the dead of the world?" he said.

But the woman answered not.

"And what is the end, you that are called Mary?"

Then the woman rose.

"Would you cross the Ford, O Torcall the Harper?"

He made no word upon that. But he listened. He heard a woman singing faint and low, far away in the dark. He drew more near.

"Would you cross the Ford, O Torcall?"

He made no word upon that; but once more he listened. He heard a little child crying in the night.

"Ah, lonely heart of the white one," he sighed, and his tears fell.

Mary Magdalene turned and looked upon him.

It was the face of Sorrow she had. She stooped and took up the tears.

"They are bells of joy," she said. And he heard a faint, sweet ringing in his ears.

A prayer came out of his heart. A blind prayer it was, but God gave it wings. It flew to Mary, who took and kissed it, and gave it song.

"It is the Song of Peace," she said. And Torcall had peace.

"What is best, Oh Torcall?" she asked,—rustling-sweet as rain among the trees her voice was. "What is best? The sword, or peace?"

"Peace," he answered; and he was white now, and was old.

"Take your harp," Mary said, "and go in unto the

Ford. But, lo, now I clothe you with a white shroud. And if you fear the drowning flood, follow the bells that were your tears; and if the dark affright you, follow the song of the prayer that came out of your heart."

So Torcall the Harper moved into the whelming flood, and he played a new, strange air like the laughing of a child.

Deep silence there was. The moonshine lay upon the obscure wood, and the darkling river flowed sighing through the soundless gloom.

The Washer of the Ford stooped once more. Low and sweet, as of yore and for ever, over the drowning souls she sang her immemorial song.

THE WOMAN WITH THE NET.

When Artân had kissed the brow of every white-robed brother on Iona, and had been thrice kissed by the aged Colum, his heart was filled with gladness.

It was late summer. In the afternoon light, peace lay on the green waters of the Sound, on the green grass of the dunes, on the white and brown domed cells of the Culdees over whom the holy Colum ruled, and on the little rock-strewn hill which rose above where stood Colum's wattled church of sun-baked mud.

The abbot walked slowly by the side of the young

man. Colum was tall, with hair long and heavy but white as the canna, and with a beard that hung low on his breast, grey as the moss on old firs. His blue eyes were tender. The youth—for though he was a grown man he seemed a youth beside Colum—had beauty. He was tall and comely, with yellow curling hair, and dark-blue eyes, and a skin so white that it troubled some of the monks who dreamed old dreams and washed them away in tears and scourgings.

"You have the bitter fever of youth upon you, Artân," said Colum, as they crossed the dunes beyond Dun-I; "but you have no fear, and you will be a flame among those Pictish idolaters, and you will be a lamp to show them the way."

"And when I come again, there will be clappings of hands, and hymns, and many rejoicings?"

"I do not think you will come again," said Colum. "The wild folk of these northlands will burn you, or crucify you, or put you upon the crahslat, or give you thirst and hunger till you die. It will be a great joy for you to die like that, Artân, my son?"

"Aye, a great joy," answered the young monk, but with his eyes dreaming away from his words.

There was silence between them as they neared the cove where a large coracle lay, with three men in it.

"Will God be coming to Iona when I am away?" asked Artân.

Colum stared at him.

"Is it likely that God would come here in a coracle?" he asked, with scornful eyes.

The young man looked abashed. For sure, God would not come in a coracle, just as he himself might come. He knew by that how Colum had reproved him. He would come in a cloud of fire, and would be seen from far and near. Artân wondered if the place he was going to was too far north for him to see that greatness; but he feared to ask.

"Give me a new name," he asked; "give me a new name, my Father."

"What name will you have?"

"Servant of Mary."

"So be it, Artân Gille-Mhoire."

With that Colum kissed him and bade farewell, and Artân sat down in the coracle, and covered his head with his mantle, and wept and prayed.

The last word he heard was, *Peace!*

"That is a good word, and a good thing," he said to himself; "and because I am the Servant of Mary, and the Brother of Jesu the Son, I will take peace to the *Cruitnè,* who know nothing of that blessing of the blessings."

When he unfolded his mantle, the coracle was already far from Iona. The south wind blew, and the tides swept northward, and the boat moved swiftly across the

water. The sea was ashine with froth and small waves leaping like lambs.

In the boat were Thorkeld, a helot of Iona, and two dark wild-eyed men of the north. They were Picts, but could speak the tongue of the Gael. Myrdu, the Pictish king of Skye, had sent them to Iona, to bring back from Colum a culdee who could show wonders.

"And tell the Chief Druid of the Crossed Tree," Myrdu had said, "that if his culdee does not show me good wonders, and make me believe in his two gods and the woman, I will put an ash-shaft through his body from his hips and out at his mouth, and send him back on the north-tide to the Isle of the White-Robes."

The sun was lying among the outer isles when the coracle passed near the Isle of the Columns. A great noise was in the air: the noise of the waves in the caverns, and the noise of the tide, like sea-wolves growling, and like bulls bellowing in a narrow pass of the hills.

A sudden current caught the boat, and it began to drift towards great reefs white with ceaseless torn streams.

Thorkeld leaned from the helm, and shouted to the two Picts. They did not stir, but sat staring, idle with fear.

Artân knew now that it was as Colum had said. God would give him glory soon.

So he took the little clàrsach he had for hymns, for

he was the best harper on Iona, and struck the strings, and sang. But the Latin words tangled in his throat, and he knew too that the men in the boat would not understand what he sang; also that the older gods still came far south, and that in the caves of the Isle of Columns were demons. There was only one tongue common to all; and since God had wisdom beyond that of Colum himself, He would know the song in Gaelic as well as though it were sung in Latin.

So Artân let the wind take his broken hymn, and he made a song of his own, and sang—

Oh Heavenly Mary, Queen of the Elements,
And you, Brigit the fair, with the little harp,
And all the saints, and all the old gods,
Speak to the Father, that He may save us from drowning.

Then, seeing that the boat drifted closer, he sang again—

Save us from the rocks and the sea, Queen of Heaven!
And remember that I am a culdee of Iona,
And that Colum has sent me to the *Cruïtnè*
To sing them the song of peace lest they be damned for ever!

Thorkeld laughed at that.

"Can the woman put swimming upon you?" he said roughly. "I would rather have the good fin of a great fish now than any woman in the skies."

"You will burn in hell for that," said Artân, the holy zeal warm at his heart.

But Thorkeld answered nothing. His hand was on

the helm, his eyes on the foaming rocks. Besides, what had he to do with the culdee's hell or heaven? When he died, he, who was a man of Lochlann, would go to his own place.

One of the dark men stood, holding the mast. His eyes shone. Thick words swung from his lips, like seaweed thrown out of a hollow by an ebbing wave.

The coracle swerved, and the four men were wet with the heavy spray.

Thorkeld put his oar in the water, and the swaying craft righted.

"Glory to God!" said Artân.

"There is no glory to your god in this," said Thorkeld scornfully. "Did you not hear what Necta sang? He sang to the woman in there that drags men into the caves, and throws their bones on the next tide. He put an incantation upon her, and she shrank, and the boat slid away from the rocks."

"That is a true thing," thought Artân. He wondered if it was because he had not sung his hymn in the holy Latin.

When the last flame died out of the west, and the stars came like sheep gathering at the call of the shepherd, Artân remembered that he had not said the prayers nor sung the Vesper hymn.

He lay back and listened. There were no bells calling across the water. He looked into the depths.

It was Manann's kingdom, and he had never heard that God was there; but he looked. Then he stared into the dark-blue, star-strewn sky.

Suddenly he touched Thorkeld.

"Tell me," he said, "how far north has the Cross of Christ come?"

"By the sea-way it has not come here yet. Murdoch the Freckled came with it this way, but he was pulled into the sea, and he died."

"Who pulled him into the sea?"

Thorkeld stared into the running wave. He had no words.

Artân lay still a long while.

"It will go ill with me," he thought, "if Mary cannot see me so far away from Iona, and if God will not listen to me. Colum should have known that, and given me a holy leaf with the fair branching letters on it, and the Latin words that are the words of God."

Then he spoke to the man who had sung.

"Who is the Woman with the Net," he said, "of whom you sang?"

Necta turned his head away.

"I said it when I sang," he said sullenly.

"Tell."

"She? She is the Woman who stands on the banks of the river."

"What river?"

"I do not know the name of the river."

"Is it north?"

"I do not know. It is the great river. The banks have mist and shadow. She has a great net. And when she nets men they are dead. She takes them out of the net, and some she throws into a caldron in the rocks, filled with green flame, and some she puts beneath her feet and tramples into dust. That is how the sand is made."

Artân shivered with the thought that leaped in his mind. All those white sands of Iona . . . were they fair beautiful women trampled into white sand by the feet of the Woman with the Net?

"What of those in the caldron?" he asked.

"They are thrown out on the wind. They pass into trees and grass and reeds, and deer and wolves, and men and women."

"Where?"

The man stared idly.

"There are three there," he said, "who watch the Woman with the Net. One sits on a great stone and is blind; one whirls a flaming sword; one stands and leans on a great spear."

"Who are these three?" asked Artân.

The man stared idly.

"There is fire on the ground below that sword. There is blood on the ground below that spear. The

man with the sword puts it into the blackness of the shadow that is about the great stone, but he does not know what is there. The man with the spear puts it into the blackness about the great stone, but he does not know what is there. The blind man on the stone has his feet in the blackness of the shadow, but he does not know what is there."

"It will be Mary," said Artân, brooding deep; "it will be Mary, and God, and the Son, and the Spirit."

But Necta the Pict stared at him.

"What have these ancient ones to do with your Iona gods, White-Robe?"

Artân frowned.

"The curse of the God of Peace upon you for that," he said angrily: "do you not know that you have hell for your dwelling-place if you speak evil of God the Father, and the Son, and the Mother of God?"

"How long have they been in Iona, White-Robe?"

The man spoke scornfully. Artân knew they had not been there many years. He had no words.

"My fathers worshipped the Sun on the Holy Isle before ever your great Druid that is called Colum crossed the Moyle. Were your three gods in the coracle with Colum? They were not on the Holy Isle when he came."

"They were coming there," answered Artân con-

fusedly. "It is a long, long way from . . . from . . . from the place they were sailing from."

Necta listened sullenly.

"Let them stay on Iona," he said: "gods though they be, it would fare ill with them if they came upon the Woman with the Net." Then he turned on his side, and lay by the man Darach, who was staring at the moon and muttering words that neither Artân nor Thorkeld knew.

For a time the culdee and the helot spoke in low voices. Thorkeld spoke of his gods. Then he laughed when he spoke of the women-haters, as he called the holy men of Iona. Artân said nothing. Why should he hate women, he thought? They were very fair, he remembered, and made the heart beat.

Thorkeld smiled. He spoke of women. Artân heard a song in the sea. The stars shone like fires in a haven. He put his hand in the water, and put that water against his dry lips. The salt stung him.

Thorkeld slept. A white calm had fallen. The boat lay like a shell on a silent pool. There was nothing between that dim wilderness and the vast sweeping blackness filled with quivering stars, but the coracle, that a wave could crush.

Artân could not sleep; it was easier to forget God, and the Son, and the Spirit, than those white women of

whom Thorkeld had spoken. He felt hands touch him, white and warm. A fever was in his blood.

Then he slept, and dreamed that he was on a misty bank by a great river. The river was salt, and moans and cries filled the lamentable rushing noise.

A great fear came upon him. He drew back, and something came out of the darkness and swept past him. The cold air of it made him stagger and shiver. He put his hands to a bush, and they went through it, and he fell. There was a spear on the ground. He put his hand on it, and it was dust.

Then he rose and cried—

> Oh Mary, Mother of God, Queen of the Elements!
> Have mercy upon Artân the Culdee!
> For it is a good deed I do coming here to the heathen,
> And Colum will tell you that, Colum of Iona!

But something swept again out of the darkness, and Artân was caught in a net, and was swung across the river. And in that net there were fish beyond count, and all were men and women, and all were dead, and were calling upon many gods.

Then he saw a white face in the dusk. Great stars shone in the hair about the brows; bats flew in the hollow caverns of the eyes; and a hand, grey-white as a cliff of clay, plucked at the mass that was in the net. Some were thrown out, and were trampled into dust, and a wind blew the dust into the river, and the grains were

borne to the lips of all isles and shores, and were idle sand thenceforth. And some were plucked by the hand, and were thrown into the great caldron of green fire. Artân was of these. And as he swam hither and thither in that immortal water that was as green fire, he saw the Blind Man on the Stone, and the Man who whirled a flaming Sword, and the Man with the Spear.

The Man with the Sword cleaved him in two parts, and Artân swam as two swim, but knew not the one part from the other, or which he was. Then the Man with the Spear drove the spear through the two parts as they swam, and they were made one. And Artân's heart shook with wonder, for in that same moment, as it seemed, he was in a dim wood, and stood by a tree, and by another tree was a woman, like a flame of pale green, and more beautiful than his dreams. He heard the wind in the grass, and saw a star among dark branches, and in the moonshine a bird sang. The woman threw a white flower at his feet, and he gave a cry, and her breast warmed his breast, and her breath was as flame, and all his youth was upon him again, and Colum was far away, and the Others were not there in that place.

Then Artân woke, and saw the cold shine of the stars, and heard the dawn-wind on the sea. To the east, the mountain-peaks of Skye rose dark, but pale light travelled along their summits. It was day.

For three years Artân dwelt among the Picts. He was called the Dart-Thrower because of his skill in war. He had to wife Oona, the daughter of Myrdu the king, and three women loved him and were held by him. But Oona only he loved. He knew no Latin words now; but once the sea-rovers brought a coracle with three culdees in it, and he heard one singing the old words as he died slowly on the tall tree where he was crucified. For one was blinded and led naked into the woods; and one was thrust through with an ash-shaft, from the hips to the mouth, and thrown upon the tide; and one was tied to a sapling, and was crucified upon a tall tree.

"I have no Latin now," said Artân to the monk, "but tell me this: Are God and the Son and the Spirit still upon Iona?"

The monk cursed him and died.

That curse went out, and lay upon Oona, and she withered, and lay down, and life went from her.

Artân took a great galley that held a score men. He set sail for Iona.

But God was now come further north than Iona; for between the Holy Isle and the Isle of the Columns the boat filled and sank.

Colum beheld this in a vision, and in a hymn praised God. Artân alone did not drown, but swam on a spar, and was washed onto the sands at Iona.

The Culdees took him.

"In the name of God," said Colum, with fierce anger in his eyes: "in the name of God, put Artân, the Servant of Mary, into the cell below the ground; and let him rest and pray there through the night; and at dawn we shall take him out upon the shore, and shall drive a stake through his breast, and the demon that is within him shall go out of him, and he himself shall go to God the Father. For he has had the holy water on him, and is of those who dwell with the saints."

For Colum knew all that Artân had done.

So Artân the Culdee lay in darkness that night. And before dawn he made this song—

It is but a little thing to sit here in the silence and the dark;
For I remember the blazing noon when I saw Oona the White.
I remember the day when we sailed the Strait in our skin-built bark,
And I remember Oona's lips on mine in the heart of the night.

So it is a little thing to sit here, hearing nought, seeing nought:
When the dawn breaks they will hurry me hence to the new-dug grave:
It will be quiet there, if it be true what the good Colum has taught,
And I shall hear Oona's voice as a sleeping seal hears the moving wave.

IV.

THE CRYING OF WIND.

After the great and terrible battle of the Field of Spears, Aodh the Harper, who was called *Aodh-of-the-Songs, left the camps of men and went into the woods.

For a year and another season of snow he drifted hither and thither therein, a blown leaf. When he was seen again of his scattered folk, his brown hair was grey, and his eyes were as a woman's tired with weeping, and as a young man's weary with vain love, and as an old man's weary with life.

He came forth clad in a slit deerskin, and in his long grey locks were sprays of mistletoe, the moon-white berries like river-pearls in the grey ashes of his hair. Behind him lolled two gaunt wolves, staring ever upward at him with famished eyes.

When he came before the King, where Congal the

* *Aodh* is pronounced as the letter *Y*.

Silent sat in his rath, listening to Barach the blind Druid, he stood still, looking out from his eyes as a man on a hill staring through the dusk at once familiar lands.

Congal looked at him.

"This is a good day that we see you again, Aodh-of-the-Songs."

Aodh said nothing.

"It is a year and a fourth part of a year since you went into the forest and were lost there as a shadow is lost."

Aodh answered nothing.

"In all that time have you known what we have not known?"

Aodh stirred and looked intently upon the king and upon the white hair and white face of Barach the Blind. Then he looked at the two gaunt wolves at his side, and he smiled.

"Aye, Congal, son of Artân, I have seen and I have heard."

"And what will you have seen, and what heard?"

"I have heard the crying of wind."

"That, too, we have heard. What is there in the crying of the wind that we have not heard?"

"I have heard the sigh of the grass."

"That, too, we have heard. What is there in the sigh of the grass that we have not heard?"

"I have seen the dew falling from the stars, and like pale smoke the dew rising again to the stars, till they were wet and bright as the scales of a salmon leaping in the moonshine."

"That also we have seen, Aodh-of-the-Harp."

"I have seen the coming and going of the stars."

"That also we have seen, Aodh."

"There is no more."

"Is there in truth no more to tell?"

"Only the crying of wind."

Congal the King sat in his place with brooding eyes. Aodh stood before him, seeing that which he had seen between the coming and going of stars.

"Play to us, Aodh-of-the-Woods."

Then Aodh took his harp and touched the strings, and sang—

I have fared far in the dim woods;
And I have known sorrow and grief,
And the incalculable years
That haunt the solitudes.
Where now are the multitudes
Of the Field of Spears?
Old tears
Fall upon them as rain,
Their eyes are quiet under the brown leaf.

I have seen the dead, innumerous:
I too shall lie thus,
And thou, Congal, thou too shalt lie
Still and white
Under the starry sky,
And rise no more to any Field of Spears,
But, under the brown leaf,
Remember grief
And the old, salt, bitter tears.

And I have heard the crying of wind.
It is the crying that is in my heart:
Oona of the Dark Eyes, Oona of the Dark Eyes,
Oona, Oona, Oona, Heart of my Heart!
But there is only the crying of wind
Through the silences of the sky,
Dews that fall and rise,
The faring of long years,
And the coverlet of the brown leaf
For the old familiar grief
And the old tears.

No man spoke when Aodh ceased singing and harping. All knew that when he had come back to the smoking, wasted rath of the King, after the Battle of the Field of Spears, he had found Oona of the Dark Eyes, whom he loved, slain with a spear betwixt the breasts. He had looked long upon her, but said nothing; and when that night she was put in the brown earth, white-robed, with white apple-blooms in her black hair, standing erect and proud as though she saw wise eyes fixed upon her, he made a song and a music for her,

and then was silent till dawn. No man had heard so strange and wild music, and never had any listened to a song wherein the words clanged and clashed heedlessly as the din of falling swords. On the morrow, Duach, a druid, had graven in Ogam her name on a stone. Aodh had stood by from dawn till the rising of the sun. Then he laughed low, and smoothed the stone with his hand, and whispered, "Come, White One, come." With that he passed into the woods.

On this day of his return he had gone straightway to the stone in the oak glade. "I come, White One, I come," he whispered there, smoothing the white stone with a slow lingering hand.

When Aodh had turned thence to the rath, and was brought before Congal the Ardrigh, there was a shining in his face.

All knew what Aodh had sung of when he sang that song of grief at the bidding of the King. Thus it was that no man spoke. There was silence while slowly, as one in a dream, he touched now one string of his harp, now another.

Suddenly it was as though he awoke.

"Where are my three hounds?" he asked,

Congal looked at him with grave eyes.

"Great was your love, Aodh. None ever had greater love for a woman than was your love for Oona the

Beautiful. But great sorrow has put a mist against your eyes."

"I hear the crying of wind, Congal."

"Aye?"

"And fair is the moon that I see sailing white and wonderful among the stars."

"There is no star yet but the Star of Fionn, and there is no moon, Aodh-of-the-Songs."

"Fair is the moon that I see sailing white and wonderful among the stars. Ah, white wonderful face of Beauty! Oona, Oona, Oona!"

The King was silent. None spoke.

"I hear the crying of wind, Congal."

"Aye?"

"Where are my three hounds, Oh King?"

"There were two wolves which came out of the forest with you—a wolf and a she-wolf. They are gone."

"There were three."

None answered.

"There were three, Oh King. And now one only abides with me."

"I see none, Aodh-of-the-Songs."

"There were three hounds with me, Congal, son of Artân. They are called Death, and Life, and Love."

"Two wolves only I saw."

"I hear the crying of wind, Congal the Silent."

"Aye?"

"In that crying I hear the baying of the two wolves whom ye saw. They are Death and Life. They roam the dark wood."

"Is there a wolf or a hound here now, Aodh-of-the-Songs?"

Aodh answered nothing, for his head was sideway, and he listened, as a hart at a well.

Barach the Blind rose and spoke.

"There is a white hound beside him, Oh King."

"Is it the hound Love?"

"It is the hound Love."

There was silence. Then the King spoke.

"What is it that you hear, Aodh-of-the-Songs?"

"I hear the crying of wind."

THE SAD QUEEN.

Two men lay bound in the stone fold behind the great wall of Dun Scàith in the Isle of Mist.

One was Ulric the Skald; the other was Connla the Harper. Only they two lived when the galleys went down in the Minch, and the Gael and the Gall sank in the reddened waves.

For a long hour they were swung on the waves and on the same spar—the mast of the *Death-Raven,* which Svén of the Long Hair had sailed in from the north isles, with a score galleys of a score men in each. Farcha the Silent had met him with two score galleys of ten men in each.

They had fought since the sun was in the south till it hung above the west. Then there were only the *Death-Raven* and the *Foam-Sweeper.* Ulric sat by Svén and sang the death-song and the song of swords; Connla sat by Farcha and sang the high song of victory.

When the galleys met through the bloody tangle in the seas, where spears rose and fell like boughs and branches of a wood in storm, and where men's hair clung black and limp past wild eyes and faces red with blood, Svén leaped into the *Foam-Sweeper,* and clove

the head from a spearman who thrust at him, so that it fell into the sea, and the headless man shook with a palsy and waveringly mowed an idle spear.

But in that doing he staggered, and Farcha thrust his spear through him. The spear fixed Svén to the mast. Then an arrow from the sea struck him across the eyes, and he saw no more; and when the *Foam-Sweeper* sank and dragged the *Death-Raven* with it, the two kings met: but Farcha was now like a heavy fish swung this way and that, and Svén thought the body was the body of Gunhild whom he loved, and strove to kiss it, but could not because of the spear and seven arrows which nailed him to the mast.

When the moon rose, the waters were in a white calm. Mid-sea, a great shadow passed northward: the travelling myriad of the herring-host.

When Ulric the Skald sank from the mast, Connla the Harper held him by the hair, and gave him breath, so that he lived.

Thus when two spears drifted near, neither snatched at them. Later, Connla spoke. "One pulls me by the feet," he said; "it is one of your dead men who is drowning me." But at that Ulric drew a long breath, and strengthened his heart: then, seizing one of the spears, he thrust it downward, and struck the dead man whose hair tangled the feet of Connla, so that the dead man sank.

When they heard cries, they thought the galleys had come again, or others of Svén's host, or of Farcha's: but when they were dragged out of the sea, and lay staring at the stars, they knew no more, for sounds swam into their ears, and mist came into their eyes, and it was as though they sank through the boat, and through the sea, and through the infinite blank void below the sea, and were as two feathers there, blown idly under dim stars.

When they woke it was day, and a woman stood looking darkly at them.

She was tall, and of great strength; taller than Connla, stronger than Ulric. Long black hair fell upon her shoulders, which, with her breast and thighs, were covered with pale bronze. A red and green cloak was over the right shoulder, and was held by a great brooch of gold. A yellow torque of gold was round her neck. A three-pointed torque of gold was on her head. Her legs were swathed with deerskin thongs, and her feet were in coverings of cowskin stained red.

Her face was pale as wax, and of a strange and terrible beauty. They could not look long in her eyes, which were black as darkness, with a red flame wandering in it. Her lips were curled, and were like thin sudden lines of blood.

"I am Scathach," she said, when she had looked

long at them. Each knew that name, and the heart of each was like a bird before the slinger. If they were with Scathach,* the queen of the warrior-women of the Isle of Mist, it would have been better to die in the water. The grey stones of Dun Scaith were russet with old blood of slain captives.

"I am Scathach," she said. "Do I look upon Svén of Lochlann and Farcha of the Middle Isles?"

"I am Ulric the Skald," answered the northman.

"I am Connla the Harper," answered the Gael.

"You die to-night," and with that Scathach stood silent again, and looked darkly upon them for a long while.

At noon a woman brought them milk and roasted elk meat. She was fair to see, though a scar ran across her face. They sent word by her to Scathach with a prayer for life; they would be helots, and put birth upon women. For they knew the wont. But the woman returned with the same word.

"It is because she loved Cuchullin," the women said, "and he was a poet, and sang songs, and made music as you do. He was fairer than you, man with the yellow hair, man with the long dark hair; and you have

* Scathach (pronounced *Skiah*): the name of the island of Skye is said to be derived from the famous Amazonian queen who lived there, and taught Cuchullin the arts of war.

put memories into the mind of Scathach. But she will listen to your harping and singing before you die."

When the darkness came, and the dew fell, Ulric spoke to Connla. "The horse Rime-mane is moving among the stars, for the foam is falling from his mouth."

Connla felt the falling of the dew.

"It was thus on the night I loved," he said below his breath.

Ulric could not see Connla's face because of the shadows. But he heard low sobs, and knew that Connla's face was wet with tears. "I too loved," he said; "I have had many women for my love."

"There is but one love," answered Connla in a low voice; "it is of that I am thinking and have remembrance."

"Of that I do not know," said Ulric. "I loved one woman well so long as she was young and fair. But one day a king's son desired her, and I came upon them in a wood on a cliff by the sea. I put my arms about her and leaped down the cliff. She was drowned. I paid no eric."

"There is no age upon the love of my love," said Connla softly: "she was more beautiful than the light in the west." And because of that great beauty he forgot death and his bonds.

When the warrior-women led them out to the shore,

Scathach looked at them from where she sat by the great fire that blazed upon the sands.

She had been told that which they said one to the other.

"Sing the song of your love," she said to Ulric.

"What heed have I of any woman in the hour of my death?" he answered sullenly.

"Sing the song of your love," she said to Connla.

Connla looked at her, and at the great fire round which the fierce-eyed women stood and stared at him, and at the still, breathless stars. The dew fell upon him.

Then he sang—

Is it time to let the hour rise and go forth, as a hound loosed from the battle-cars?
Is it time to let the hour go forth, as the White Hound with the eyes of flame?
For if it be not time, I would have this hour that is left to me under the stars,
Wherein I may dream my dream again, and, at the last, whisper one name.

It is the name of one who was fairer than youth to the old, than life to the young;
More fair than the first love of Angus the Beautiful, and though I were blind
And deaf for a hundred ages I would see her, more fair than any poet has sung,
And hear her voice like mournful songs crying on the wind.

There was silence. Scathach sat with her face between her hands, staring into the flame.

She did not lift her face when she spoke.

"Take Ulric the Skald," she said at last, but with eyes that stared still into the flame, "and give him to what woman wants him, for he knows nothing of love. If no woman wants him, put a spear through his heart, so that he die easily.

"But take Connla the Harper, because he has known all things, knowing that one thing, and has no more to know, and is beyond us: and lay him upon the sand with his face to the stars, and put red brands of fire upon his naked breast, till his heart bursts and he dies."

So Connla the Harper died in silence, where he lay on the moonlit sand, with red embers and flaming brands on his naked breast, and his face white and still as the stars that shone upon him.

THE END.

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